

Stories of the OLD SAINTS



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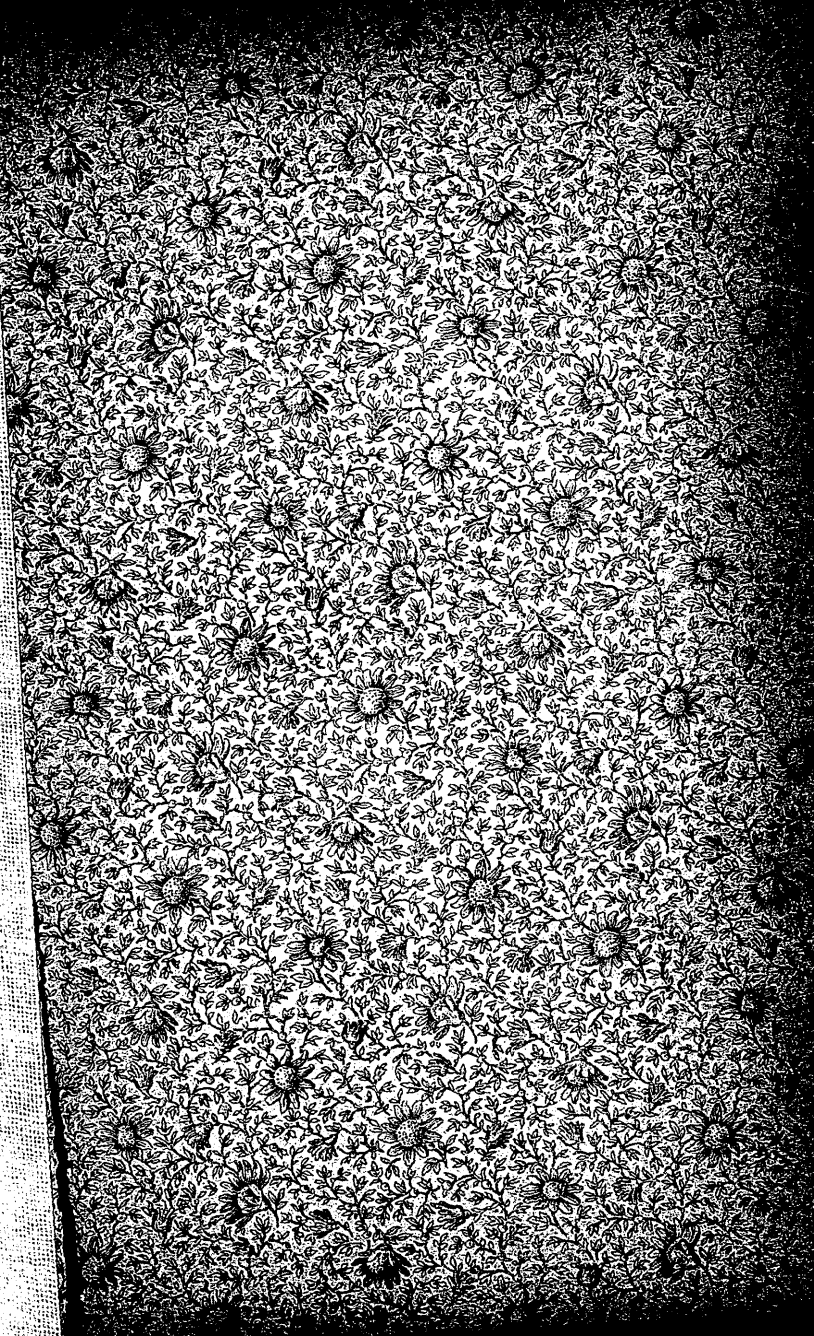
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Stories of the Old Saints

and the

Anglo-Saxon Church.

By the late

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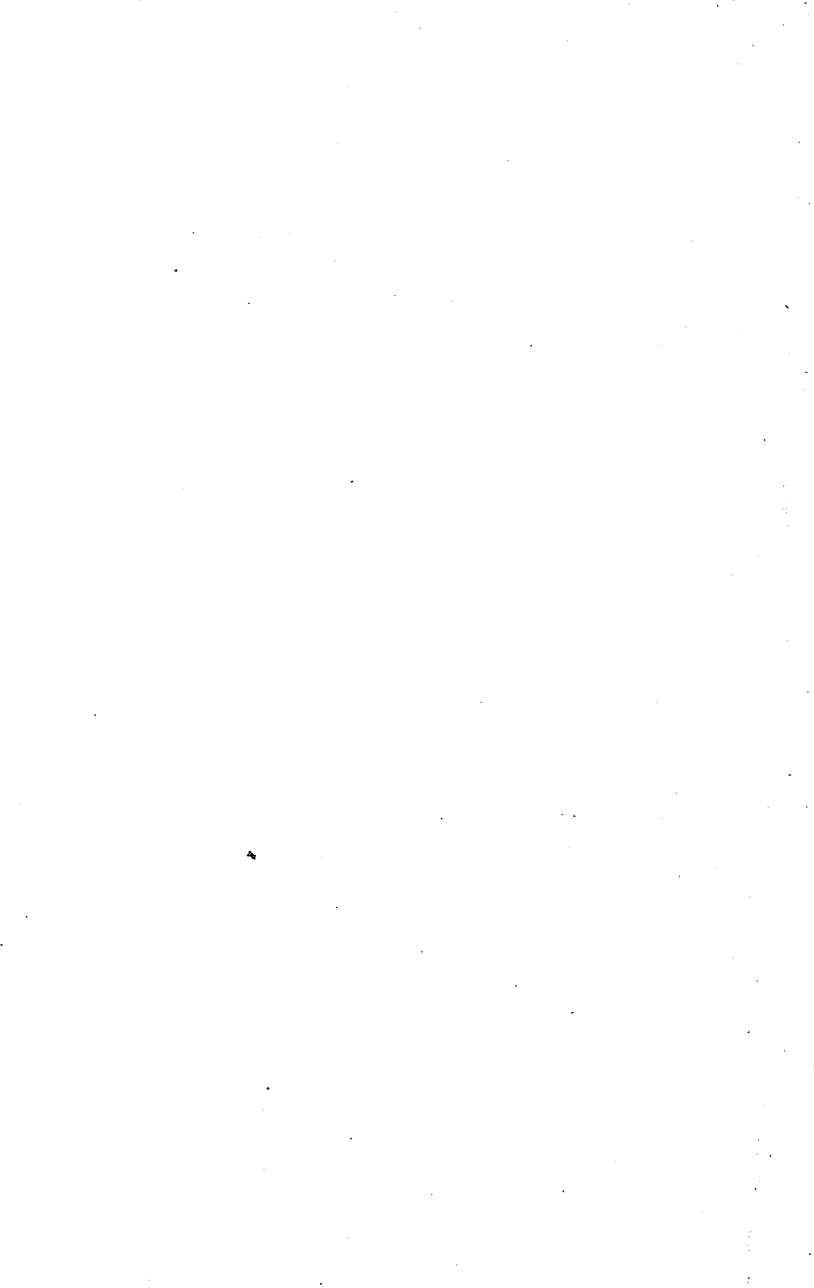
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A Tale of Christmas Eve.

A.D. 1006.

(Founded on fact.)



Y name is Eadgyth; and I am a Sister of the nunnery of the Blessed S. Frideswide in Oxeneford, where I have found peace in serving God with fasting and prayer for nearly half a century.

The good Mother of our House, the Abbess Eanfled, begs me ere I leave a world, in which I cannot linger much longer, to relate the history of the destruction of the Nunnery at Ceolseye (Cholsey) wherein I was a Novice, by the cruel Danes at the Feast of the Nativity, in the year of Grace 1006: as we used then to say, "the year six."

This Convent was founded by that most unhappy King Ethelred—whom men call "The Unready,"—in atonement for the murder, by his cruel mother, of his step-brother Edward the Martyr. It had but a brief existence—of only twenty years, and at the time when I joined it as a Novice, it had very nearly run its course; but

are the prayers, and alms deeds, and sacrifices which thence ascended to God forgotten?—not before the throne of Grace.

Ever since the death of that man of God, S. Dunstan, the heathen Danes had been permitted to ravage the land; on S. Brice's night, Ethelred treacherously slew those who had made peace and settled amongst us, in requital of the cruel deeds of their countrymen; and even those who took sanctuary were not spared, whence God's judgments fell yet heavier upon us. Our Convent was under the rule of the blessed Saint Benedict; although I fear we had departed somewhat from the holy severity thereof, or perchance the Hand of God had not fallen upon us.

All through the summer of the year "six" we had heard dreadful tidings of the ravages of the Northmen, under King Sweyn: who harried the land with fire and sword, to avenge the cruel death of his sister Gunhilda, on S. Brice's night. Each shire was successively the scene of his merciless cruelties; especially did he rage against the Houses of God, whether Churches or Convents; and many of our Sisters of the order of S. Benedict had experienced insult, torture or death, at the hands of his fierce soldiers, so that the stories we heard curdled our very blood.

But in the autumn we heard with much relief, that the Danes and their fierce King had taken up their winter quarters in the Isle of Wight, and that we need not fear any further ravages at their hands until the winter had passed away: ere which time it was fondly hoped our armies and

ships might be ready to deal with them, so that they should never harry England again.

The November of the year "six" was wet and gloomy, as is usual at the fall of the leaf, with occasional fitful gleams of sunshine; but in December there came dry weather with sharp frosts, so that the roads, unhappily for us, were in better order than usual.

Our poor home lay near the foot of the Berkshire Downs: it was protected by a brook on the west, and moats on the other sides. The brook, which was of remarkably sweet and fresh water, and which was supposed to possess healing virtues, only rose from the earth half a mile nearer the Downs.

The foundations of our house were of stone, but the superstructure was chiefly of wood; it was built in the form of a hollow square; on the northern side was the Chapel, on the eastern the Chapter-house, on the southern the refectory, and the dormitories were on the western side. Within was a plat of greensward, with a crucifix of stone in the centre, and a cloister ran round the interior of the buildings.

Our Chapel, although mainly of wood, was richly adorned with the royal gifts; our best vestments and Altar frontal were of cloth of gold for the great festivals; and our Altar vessels were likewise of pure gold.

But all this was nought without the offering of our hearts, and I fear we must have fallen from our first love, or the heavy judgment would not have come upon us which I have now to relate.

Ebba was our Mother, and if one holy soul could have saved us, she might have done so; in manners most winning, in sanctity as nearly without a stain as we poor mortals may be.

Eadhelm was our Mass-Priest, who daily celebrated the Holy Mysteries, and was the officiant at Vespers each day: the other Offices we said ourselves, with a "Reader" chosen by lot, as the Priest had other duties.

Far away, beneath the downs, stretched a vast forest, the haunt of wolves and boars, and of innumerable herds of deer and smaller game: a few forest hamlets might be found at intervals, and here and there a holy hermit had fixed his retreat. Of course we knew it only by such reports as found their way from the world into the cloister, and were talked over in our recreation hour, when we looked forth on the distant woods from our happy home.

And now for my story—only adding that we were at that time about twenty-five in number, of whom five or six like myself were Novices, seeking admission to the order. I was one of a large family, and my parents had given me to the Lord, as they said, that I might pray for them all.

The first warning we had of impending danger was at Vespers, on the seventeenth of December; we had just sung the proper antiphon for the day, "*O Adonai*,"^a at the close of Magnificat, when an

^a "O LORD and Ruler of the House of Israel, Who appearedst unto Moses in a flame of fire in the Bush, and gavest him the Law in Sinai,—Come and deliver us with an outstretched arm."

aged Sister called Hertha, who was often favoured with open visions and manifestations from the Lord, fell into an ecstasy and cried aloud :

“Yea verily, He that spake unto Moses in the flame of fire in the Bush, shall likewise speak by fire to this poor House of S. Hilda—and only those who shall flee to the desert shall escape.”

We listened with awe.

She sat down again. Father Eadhelm continued the Office, and recited the memorials in a voice which showed some perturbation of spirit.

Vespers were said at six of the evening, and there was silence according to our rule until Compline at nine: the time was spent in meditation, save by those who had duties to perform, and we could not talk together of the words we had heard, but we thought of them the more, and I fear they formed the chief subject of our meditation.

Now we had a small refection before Compline, and while we ate, the appointed reader of the day read in the pulpit of oak the passage of Scripture which served as a text to a short homily of S. Guthlac; it was this: “*Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when His Glory shall be revealed, ye may rejoice with exceeding joy.*”

Now we had a farm attached to the Convent, given us by King Ethelred for our support, and there was a churl and thralls^b who worked it for

^b Farmer and labourers.

us, and yielded us the fruit in due season : one of these thralls was a shepherd named Cutha, and on the Holy Night when the Shepherds at Bethlehem were tending their sheep on the hills, he was out on the Berkshire Downs, tending his : for it had come on to snow, and some of his sheep had wandered as sheep will,—both two footed and four footed : all we like sheep had gone astray too.

Now his wanderings carried him as far as the summit of Lowbury Hill, where there was a beacon, and a keeper thereof, one Mull, who lived in a hut by the beacon ; for the times were dangerous, and even in winter thralls were always told off to keep the beacon and light it if they saw the blood-red standard of fire flame from either of the hills within sight.

And truly from that height there were many high hills in sight. The hill of Leith in Surrey, the beacon of Kynges clere, the White Horse in the west, the Cotswolds in the north-west, and the beacon nigh unto Kyngeston under the Chiltern Hills.

Now as Cutha could not readily find his sheep, he went to the hut of Mull to ask if he had seen aught of them. It was all dark, and at first Cutha thought there was no one there, but groping in the darkness he came upon the body of a man all stiff and cold. As soon as he could get a light he found it was the corpse of the poor beacon-keeper, whose head had been cleft through with an axe.

The poor thrall was dead and gone, and nothing

could be done for him, but then came the question—"who had slain him, and why?"

Cutha was a shrewd man, and suspected mischief; none would be likely to slay a poor thrall, not worth robbing, unless he had wanted to stay him from performing his duty, it must be someone who wanted the beacon to remain unwatched—and perhaps the other beacon-keepers had been removed from their hills by violence or otherwise.

As we afterwards learned, such was the case. Now Mull lived at Streatley, where the great road called the Ickleton Way crosses the Thames, and that village is also on the road which leads from Radynges to Walingeford. There, too, lived the Reeve or head man of the district, and thither Cutha bent his steps, going down the Ickleton Way, towards the river valley, in the fast falling snow.

When he had walked a couple of miles he came to the junction of the two roads, and as he arrived he heard pitiable cries from the village below; he drew nearer warily, for he was a prudent man, and had a shrewd guess of the terrible truth.

The cries grew fainter and fainter, for the awful work was almost done; two or three terrified fugitives were running up the road, closely pursued, and as the foremost reached Cutha, he cried:

"Run for your life! the Danes! the Danes!"

Cutha needed no further warning, he took to his heels in good earnest, and being fleet of foot he reached his own home safely, where he first

warned his wife and children to flee to the woods, sent his two boys to arouse the village, and himself came running to the Convent.

It would have been all too late, but as we afterwards learnt, the Danes were bent on surprising Walingeford, which afforded a richer prey, and hence they had not burned the poor village of Streatley, lest the flames should give the town warning. For Walingeford was surrounded by a strong entrenchment, with defences of osier work on the top, and had the flock had fair warning I do not think the Danes would have got in, as, alas, they did.

We were all of us busy in decorating our little Chapel for the Christmas midnight Mass. The first Vespers and Compline of the Feast had been said, but there were still further things to be done to deck the Altar-throne of the Son of Mary. He who came of old to Bethlehem would visit us in very Flesh and Blood, and be born again in our hearts. Ah, He was not to come in such lowly guise that night, for the day of the LORD was at hand, a day bringing a foe of which it is written in Joel's ancient word: "*A fire devoureth before them, and behind them a flame burneth; the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness.*" Ah me, it was a gruesome night!

I was busy decorating the Sanctuary under the direction of the Mistress of the Novices; the green holly with red berries—for we had not flowers in winter—the best draperies we had, all lent their aid to beautify His dwelling, and to

make the place of His Feet glorious. Oh, that fated but dear little Church—it was to go the way of many another: but when I think of it even now, it causes tears to rush unbidden to mine eyes.

A profound silence reigned in the Convent: we went about our holy task with noiseless foot, our thoughts were set on the great Mystery of which we had already sung at Evensong, and the Antiphon, "*At sunrise ye shall see the King of Kings proceeding from His chamber, and rejoicing as a giant to run his course,*"—was lingering in our ears and hearts, when the sweet reign of silence was all too rudely broken by a loud cry of wailing and alarm.

Our hearts beat with terror, what could it mean?

Then the Mother came in, pale as death, and beckoned us out; then, as if remembering herself, came and fell down before the Altar—so soon to be a prey to devouring flames—uttered a great sob, then repressing herself for the sake of others, went out still beckoning us.

We followed—and outside stood the shepherd Cutha in the entrance, which was crowded by the Sisters; he was white with snow, but his face was yet paler, and with horror-stricken words, he told us that the Danes were coming.

"Go to the Chapter-house," said the Mother; "remember that you are the sisters of the Martyrs who have gone before you. I will hear all Cutha has to say, and follow you directly: let there be no weeping or wailing, be strong in CHRIST, who was born this night."

We all went to the Chapter-house. Even we Novices, who had no right to share in the deliberations, crowded in—and waited. There was silence, at least, save a little wailing, which could not be suppressed, from the Novices and younger Sisters. The Mistress of the Novices, Bega, sat as upright as a holy image.

In came the Mother after a few minutes, which seemed hours to us, for every moment we expected to hear the shout of the Danes without: that awful war-cry, worse than the roaring of wild beasts.

“My children,” said she, with terrible calmness, “it is too true, the Danes are at hand—but they do not seem to be coming this way, or they would have been here before now: they are bent on other prey—perchance Walingeford, but our turn must come,—and we must either stay here and perish with our holy home, or go forth into the winter storm.”

Some began to cry, but the Mother continued: “Let there be no vain lamentations, ‘It is the LORD, let Him do what seemeth Him good;’ only before we decide, let us invoke His aid, and sing the ‘*Veni Creator.*’”

And truly we all sang, with trembling voices, the hymn, “*Veni Creator Spiritus.*”

When we had risen, the votes were solemnly taken, each Sister giving her decision aloud; to the great joy of the younger, the majority were for going forth: alleging the text, “*When they persecute you in one city, flee ye into another;*” a minority were for remaining, and awaiting God’s Will

where we were,—also adding, that the intense cold could slay as surely as fire, if more slowly.

Then spake the Mother.

“Perchance ye have forgotten that a week ago to-night God spake to us by our Sister Hertha, then in ecstasy, forewarning us of this fiery trial, and that they only should escape who should flee into the desert; moreover, we are not without a refuge in the wilderness. There is the Convent farm in the woods beyond Estune (Aston), where we may seek temporary refuge, for it is too remote to be in present danger from the Danes. Thither Cutha, our faithful shepherd, proposes to lead us.”

The aged Sister Bega, Mistress of the Novices, rose, and waited for permission to speak. The Mother inclined her head.

“Our Sister Hertha has not spoken—has she any further revelation for us?” said Bega.

“The SPIRIT has not moved me since that night,” replied Hertha.

“And was thy revelation that we should seek safety in the deserts of compulsion or choice to us?”

“I know not. I was a mere instrument, or mouth-piece, of One who spake by my lips.”

“Then, Mother, allow me for one to stay. I have seen this holy home grow from its commencement: I have come to love our Chapel and its Altar as the ante-chamber of heaven; if it perish, let me perish with it, and ascend, like Elias, in a chariot of fire to heaven. I would fain thus win the martyr’s crown as others have done.”

Two or three other aged Sisters signified their assent to the words of the speaker.

Then the Mother answered.

"There shall be no compulsion; let each one do as God shall incline her heart. The younger, at least, will go, as they have already signified; and I must go to take care of the lambs committed to my care. Let those who will remain, repair to the Chapel; let those who are doubtful seek God's counsel there; let those who will depart prepare at once. Men are already posted who will give us timely warning of the approach of the foe."

We were silent for a moment, then about a dozen Sisters rose and went to the Chapel; the rest remained in their places till the sound of the departing feet had ceased.

In the silence we heard the bell of the Parish Church ringing for their midnight Mass—they had evidently not heard the news. Suddenly it ceased, then rang hurriedly, as it used to do when there was a fire in the village, and again ceased *for ever*.

"They have taken the alarm. Now, my children, gather together what is most precious and portable, put on your warmest garments, and meet in the porch."

It was not much that we had to gather together. Some had precious mementoes, and manuscripts containing meditations and prayers; some a few relics of departed friends.

Father Eadhelm had already removed the holy relics from the Altar, and our most precious vestments and the golden Altar vessels were taken. The Sisters who were minded to remain sobbed as

they saw it done as they knelt in the Chapel, and Sister Bega could not restrain herself.

"Father," she said, "leave us one relic, the wood of the Cross, it may preserve us; if not, it may teach us how to die."

He could not resist their prayer—it was left in its reliquary on the Altar.

The midnight hour had now arrived, and our scouts came in to say that the foe was burning Walingeford, and that the town was sending forth vast columns of flame to heaven, as could be seen across the common.

We shuddered.

"They are not yet coming here, then?"

The scouts thought they would be too busy with their plunder to come at once, but there was great risk in remaining.

"Then by God's help," said the Mother, "there shall at least be one Christmas Mass said in this fated Chapel: and after, if God will, we will depart."

And we all agreed with her, in spite of the remonstrances of Cutha. We *wanted that* comfort, and those who felt ashamed to fly, yet feared to stay, felt much relieved; we should at least all communicate together once more.

And so our Altar was vested for the last time in its golden vesture of cloth of gold, like that of the king's daughter in the Psalms: and the first Christmas Mass was begun at once.

O, what a solemn yet sweet time it was—those who *could* withdraw their minds from the Danes, whose war-cry might at any moment be heard, ex-

perienced the sweetness of Divine consolation; and we prayed that He who had made that holy night to shine with the brightness of the True Light would enlighten our path that night: go forth with us into the woods, and make us at least to experience the blessed sight of that Light for evermore, all reunited in the joy of the LORD.

So we parted at the Altar. Six alone decided to remain; nineteen, of whom I was one, under the guidance of Cutha, went forth weeping into the wilderness, amidst the fast-falling snow.

When we set foot on the great common—which stretched its weary length between Walingeford and the Downs, and between us and the woods, where we sought refuge from cruel men—we saw a dreadful sight, which made us exceedingly fear and quake. Three miles away, over the snow-clad waste, the flames of the burning town rose to heaven, and were reflected on the snow, which shone with a blood-red hue, so that the whole country seemed on fire; we thought on the poor town-folk and shuddered, while we prayed for them with all our hearts.

Around us many forms dotted the snow, the poor folk of Ceolseye all seeking shelter, like us, in the woods. There were rude carts containing the aged, the children, and the sick; while women and their little ones, protected by their husbands, trudged on foot. Some carried precious articles they would fain rescue from the flames which awaited their dwellings, and many of the children carried household pets—kittens, birds, rabbits,

and the like; the dogs followed of their own accord.

A confused sound of wailing arose from the waste; it reminded one of the Last Day—now, doubtless, near at hand—only there will be no flying from the fire which shall then try every one's work, whether religious or secular.

Happily the wood was near, happily indeed, for no sooner had we reached it, than a vivid flame arose from the far end of the village, that nearest to Walingeford.

We stopped, we could not help it, and gazed as it rapidly spread from house to house, getting nearer to our Convent. We thanked heaven that there were few folk in those burning dwellings—oh, that merciful warning; yet we afterwards learned there were some poor paralysed folk, who, like our six Sisters, would not come forth, or were, perchance, forgotten—let us hope not wilfully abandoned—in that frantic rush for life.

We were not allowed to stay long, so we did not see our home take fire; our guards hurried us into the dark woods, amidst the snow-drifts. How we got along I can hardly tell; the carts stuck in the drifts every now and then, and the efforts to get them out were frantic—for we dreaded pursuit, knowing that the Danes loved bloodshed and murder even more than gold or plunder.

After we had plunged through the woods for some time, we came to the old Roman camp, on the hill of Blewburton. It was surrounded by an entrenchment, and there many men had assembled,

all armed, and were preparing to withstand the foe, for the place was capable of defence. Many of the fugitives, tired and worn out, took refuge there, and gazed from the summit on their burning village in the distance; we looked back *once*, and saw the flames arising from our own poor house; we thought of our six Sisters, and wept aloud, with a most bitter wailing. The Mother checked us, and said :

“ Weep not, they have won their crown ;” then she broke down too, and could check us no longer. Yet it was their own choice, and our prospects were sad enough too. “ It is better (said the Mother) to be in Paradise, where there are no Danes.”

A natural thought then, but when those Danes were converted, and rebuilt with holy zeal the Houses of God which they had destroyed, they did not make bad Christians.

Cutha would not permit us to stay there: he said the Convent farm was safer : “ What can we poor folks do against the Black Danes. They will storm the place, and slay every one.”

So we resumed our painful journey, and by God’s blessing in another hour we drew near our farm in the woods just before dawn; it was in a country so tangled and difficult, that there was small fear of the Danes finding us, that is, if this invasion were only (as it afterwards proved) a *raid*, and not an *occupation* of the country.

Once within sight our hearts were cheered; we saw the place lighted up to receive us, for Cutha

had outrun us—we found fire and food. Many of the poor Sisters who had ridden in carts were half frozen with the cold; we who had walked were very tired, but that was all. One or two of the elder ones never recovered that night, but soon rejoined our six Martyrs in Paradise.

We kept that sad Christmas Day at the Farm in fear and trembling: hardly expecting to survive the day, expecting hourly to hear the war-cry of the foe, and feeling incapable of further exertion to escape them. Still we said all the Offices of the day, and moreover the Office of the Dead, for our dear Sisters and the other sufferers.

But of GOD's great mercy the Danes never sought us in the forest. They departed along the *ÆSCENDUNE* hills for *CWICHELMS HLAWE*, where *Cwicwhelm*, the first King of Wessex, who died a Christian, lay buried; and this they did as a daring boast, for it had been prophesied that if they dared to profane that place, they would never see the sea again. So they feasted and revelled there like swine for nine days and nights, after which they crossed the Downs, and passing Newbury and Winchester, which were too strong to be taken by assault, they reached the sea at Southampton, and returned to their winter quarters in the Isle of Wight, none making them afraid.

And when the raid was over we all found refuge in different Sisterhoods which had escaped the visitation; and the Novices, of whom I was one, were sent to this dear house of S. Frideswide:

here I took the vows, and here I remain,
planted like a green olive tree in the house of
my God, until He remove me to His Garden
above.

NOTE.—The ill-fated Convent was never rebuilt—its site is distinctly marked by the moats referred to on page 3. The village also lay waste until Henry the First gave the manor to his new foundation of Reading Abbey, when the Church was rebuilt as it now stands—a remarkably good specimen of a small Norman Minster, cruciform in shape. At the recent restoration the burnt stones of the earlier Church were found imbedded in the walls.





The Legend of S. Eustace.



IN the days of the Emperor Trajan there lived a Roman general whose name was Placidus ; distinguished while yet a heathen for his humanity and philanthropy, virtues very uncommon in those days of violence and tyranny ; like Cornelius, his prayers and alms had gone up before God, and won for him the grace of conversion.

Hunting in his own domains beneath the Sabine hills, he was attracted by the sight of a stag of singular size and beauty, and followed it afar over hill and dale, until at length it led him away from all his companions into a deep wooded valley, bounded by lofty cliffs, tending towards the setting sun.

At the extremity of the valley, the animal gained the cliffs, and attaining their summit by a winding track, suddenly paused at the extreme edge of the precipice, and awaited the pursuer, who just then arrived at the foot.

Placidus looked up, and to his astonishment saw the stag thus standing, and between his wide branching horns he saw a brilliant light, in the centre of which was the figure of the SAVIOUR, whom yet he knew not, stretched upon His Cross.

“What art thou?” cried the general.

A voice appeared to come in reply from the stag:

“I am He by whom the worlds were formed, who, for man’s redemption, came down from heaven,—JESUS CHRIST, Crucified for thee.”

And like S. Paul, trembling and astonished, the general cried, “LORD, what wilt thou have me to do?”

“Arise, and go into the city, and in the Via Transbertina, seek one Anacletus—he is the chief Pastor of My flock, and he shall tell thee how thou and thy household may be saved.”

Then the vision faded away, the stag disappeared, and the general returned home in the darkness, deeply pondering.

His wife Placidia was a sweet soul, possessing already the “grace of congruity,” as her husband also possessed it. They left their country home, and with their children sought the city, and Pope Anacletus. To him they related the wondrous vision,—and from him they heard the words of truth and life—they became Catechumens;—in due time they were baptised, and took new names. The general was called Eustace, his wife Theopista, his two sons, Agapius and Theopiston.

And as they were about to return to their Sabine home and dependants, now to become a little Christian colony—the good Bishop said, “one word, my son, remember that whom the LORD loveth He chasteneth,—and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. Take up thy Cross boldly, and follow Him.”

The words of the Pope were prophetic. Placidus, or *Eustace* as we must now call him, returned to his estate amongst the Sabine Hills, where he had been so greatly favoured by God, and yielded himself up to the joy of his new-found faith, of the life of God in the soul. But, like holy Job, it pleased God to inflict upon Eustace many grievous afflictions, that the strength of his faith might be made manifest, as gold tried by the fire: the members of a Thorn-crowned Head must not expect to escape their share of the sufferings of life, or to repose for ever on beds of down.

A terrible pestilence, afflicting both beasts and men, broke out in the Sabine estate, and many faithful servants died, their death beds soothed by the teaching of the Gospel from their master's lips, and the holy ministrations of the Priest who had been sent to this new colony of the faithful: but at length the place became unfit for human habitation, and the general took his family elsewhere, until the pestilence and murrain should have departed. During his absence thieves entered and spoiled the villa, so that the unfor-

fortunate Eustace was reduced to dire poverty. Unwilling to remain as a poor man where he had filled a higher sphere, he determined to emigrate with his wife and children, and to lead a simple life in North Africa, *then the granary of Europe*, as a farmer, trusting to find happiness in that humble position, afar from the haunts of vice or temptations of cities.

They found a vessel at the port of Ostia preparing to start for Egypt, and paid their passage so far as they were able: they found favour in the sight of the captain, or rather appeared to do so, for he meditated treachery. On the deck they stood and watched the fast-receding shores of Italy with tearful eyes; but—

“The world was all before them where to find
Their place of rest; and Providence their guide.”

So they yielded not to sad feelings,—but hoped on.

Coasting along the North of Africa, the captain suddenly demanded the rest of the passage-money, and as the unfortunate passengers were unable to pay it, the villain set the father and two sons ashore on the desert coast, detaining the unhappy wife and mother, by violence, as a slave or hostage for the debt. There was no help at hand; the tyrant was master on board his own ship, and lord of the situation; his crew were at his beck and call, and the unhappy Eustace could only stand on the shore, where he had been forcibly deposited, and say to the poor weeping boys, “There goes your mother.”

There they lingered till night-fall,—when the husband and father, gaining strength from the Father-hood of God, knelt down on the sand with his boys, and committed their care to Him who seeth all things. “*Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him,*” was the burden of that prayer.

It was now necessary to find shelter and food, and they turned their steps inland. The country was uninhabited for miles, and partly covered with dense jungle, or underwood: at length a small river arrested their steps; it was too deep for the little boys to wade across, so their father, leaving the younger on the bank, carried the eldest one over, purposing to return for the other, when, just as he reached the bank, he heard a piercing scream, and as he turned round saw his darling in the act of being carried off by a huge wolf. He rushed back, leaving the elder boy on the further bank, and pursued the wolf in vain: then his thoughts were recalled to the danger of the other darling of his heart, he returned to find he had vanished also—alas! poor father.

For a time he was overcome; paralyzed with grief, he felt as if he should lose his senses:—he roamed the forest in vain, seeking either boy, until he fell from exhaustion.

And as he did so he thought he heard the words. “*O tarry thou the Lord’s leisure; be strong, and He shall comfort thine heart, and put thou thy trust in the Lord.*”

And God, who is able to do all things, poured the grace of resignation into his soul, so that

he slept on a pillow of moss like a child, unharmed by ravenous beast, or the malaria of the swamps.

When he awoke the sun was shining brightly, and he rose: the pangs of hunger were now keenly felt, and he sought food and shelter. He walked steadily onward, till he came to a woodland farm. God, who said to Elijah of old time, "*Behold, I have commanded a widow woman to sustain thee,*" had now commanded these people to succour His servant Eustace. He found a home poor indeed, but all he cared for then.

And there the former mighty general and senator of imperial Rome dwelt as a poor labourer for many long years. Like Cincinnatus of old, but from even nobler motives, he had abandoned the sword for the plough-share.

Years passed away, and there came a time of trouble to the Empire. The Persians had declared war, and entered the eastern frontier, and were harrying the provinces of the east with fire and sword. It touched the pride of the proud Trajan to the quick, and he hastened to the scene.

But who should command his proud legions under him, and be indeed the real director of the campaign? for one was wanted, versed in the manners and customs of the East, acquainted with the country and trained in every detail of the art of war: there was but *one* such in the

Emperor's opinion, his old general Placidus, of whom he had lost sight so long.

So he had close and strict enquiries made; he learned that the general had emigrated to North Africa: and immediately the police of the province, a most highly organized body, skilful as beagles in following a chase, were on the quest everywhere.

Now Placidus, or rather as we prefer to call him *Eustace*, was leading a life of perfect contentment on the Egyptian farm, working under his employers, as humbly as if he had never known any other mode of life, and enjoying times of blest communion with God, when driving the plough, or alone in manual labour.

His life had not been a useless one, he had brought all around him to the knowledge of the true God, and of the faith of the Church. A Priest had been found who came and ministered amongst them each Lord's Day or Day of Bread, as they delighted to call that day on which they fed on the Bread of Life.

He prayed often for his wife and children, but as being (so he thought) in Paradise: for their perfect consummation and bliss, while in the waiting Church. So the years rolled calmly on, like a quiet river gliding to the ocean of eternity, placid, uneventful.

But one night he had a remarkable vision. He thought the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a dream—"Eustace," said the angelic messenger, "like Job hast thou been tried, like Job shalt thou be rewarded; put off the garments

of mourning and affliction, and gird thyself for thy work: for, lo, thy sons and thy wife shall again be thine! with tears thou didst lose them, and with joy shalt thou receive them. Behold, two men seek thee, go with them, nothing doubting."

And the very next day, as he was ploughing in the field, two of his old veterans, who had fought and bled by his side in many a campaign, came to his side, and greeted him, "*Imperator*, long have we sought for thee, what doest thou here?"

"I am earning my bread by the sweat of my brow; it was the primal lot of man, and is the happiest."

"But no longer must thou enjoy it: the Augustus, whose will none can dispute, has sent for thee, and we have his warrant to bring thee to him. Fear not, he thinks to promote thee to great power: we want a leader against the Persians; only thou canst fill the place."

Eustace remembered the dream of the night before, and yielded himself to God's will without a murmur; he left his quiet farm with a sad heart, and sailed for Antioch to join the Emperor.

The preparations were made, the expedition started. In the darkness of the night it was assailed by the foe, after the camp was set, but two young men of the Numidian corps, by their extraordinary valour kept the gate like Horatius of old, until help came. The general sent for

them, his heart yearned towards them, he knew not why: he gave them the rank of Centurion, and ever kept them near him; they were like his sons, he thought, as they would have been had God preserved them.

One day the army had encamped in the suburbs of a great city, when the general was told that the poor woman who owned the ground on which his tent was pitched wished to see him; ever ready to redress injuries, he admitted her to his presence, and when she entered, and their eyes met, he recognized *her*, and she *him*. It was his wife, Theopista.

The suddenness of the thing almost prostrated them both. She fell to the ground fainting; he could only strive to restore her to sensation, continually saying, "my dear wife, my dear wife," as if he were himself distracted with joy.

His two faithful centurions had witnessed the scene, they retired from a sense of delicacy, but compared notes.

"How strange this recognition! I would I could thus meet my parents from whom I was borne away when a boy."

"And I from mine; but how didst thou lose thine?"

"A huge wolf carried me off, while my father was crossing a river with my brother on his back. Some wood cutters saw the beast bearing me away, and by the aid of their dogs delivered me; but it was long before I came to my senses, and I never saw my father again."

"And mine is a like tale : my father carried me across a river while he left my brother on the further bank, when some kidnappers passing by, seeing me alone, decoyed me away and sold me for a slave, so that my poor father never found me again."

"My brother," said the other, and they embraced, trembling with emotion. "Come, let us tell our story to the general,"—hardly knowing wherefore. Need we say more : months of blissful happiness were all that remained to this re-united family on earth ; they were to glorify God by a common martyrdom.

The expedition was completely successful ; a mighty victory was won, when Trajan died and was succeeded by Adrian. The army of the East returned to Rome, and was decreed a triumph by the Senate. They entered the city with the greatest joy and pomp ; the procession was a mile in length, and hundreds of triumphal cars were loaded with spoils.

Now it was the custom that the victor at the close of the triumphal procession should ascend the Capitol, and offer the chief victim to the Capitoline Jove : the Emperor was there, and all the chief men of the mighty nation, Patricians, Senators, and before all these the general and his sons declined to complete the ceremony, alleging openly that they were Christians.

The general sensation was such, that for a time every one was speechless ; at last the voice of Adrian was heard :

"I have but one law for all my subjects,

Placidus know that thou and thy sons must sacrifice or die."

"Then we must die; and, my lord, death will be the gate of Life to us."

All the population of Rome crowded the mighty Colosseum, for a general with his wife and children were to be exposed to the lions.

And they stood all four where now the Cross stands which bears the words—

"Christus vincit, Christus regnat, Christus imperat," the object of all beholders.

The Emperor offers them life once more:

It is calmly refused.

The lions are loosed on the four.

The beasts refuse to touch them, but bound wildly round the enclosure, and try to leap amidst the crowd.

This is continued a long time.

Then the Emperor orders the beasts to be driven in, and a frightful instrument of torture, a brazen bull, hollow within, to be brought into the amphitheatre,—so contrived that flames may be kindled beneath, and that the cries of the victims may sound like the bellowing of the beast.

They allowed themselves to be placed within, meekly and calmly.

The flames are kindled, but no sound is heard; the multitude watch in vain,—their cruel curiosity is not gratified, and at length all depart.

When the brazen bull was cool, and could be opened, the bodies of the four, unhurt by the fire, were found within,—they had gone peacefully to sleep.

And devout men, at great price, obtained the precious relics,—and deposited them beneath the Altar of one of the subterranean Churches of the Catacombs ; whence, after the victory of the Faith, they were translated and placed beneath the Altar of the Church, dedicated to the memory of S. Eustace and his companions.

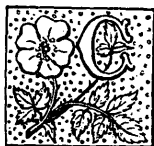
NOTE.—This beautiful legend, which I have so imperfectly told, is found in substance in the Breviary lections for Sep. 20th, “S. Eustachii et sociorum, Martyrum.” Of course it is mainly legend, not history.





The Defile of Dunnechtan.

A TALE OF S. WILFRID.



REAT was the magnificence of Bishop Wilfrid, his earthly state and riches, the monasteries he ruled, the Churches he had built, the pomp of his retinue; in truth, in King Egfrid's palace you would not meet so many nobly nurtured pages, or such troops of well-ordered menials.

His bishopric was coextensive with the kingdom of Northumbria, and men knew not which was the greater in worldly power, the Bishop or the King: yet in Wilfrid's mind, all this was subordinate to his spiritual sway: he held it all for God's glory, at least he thought so; and only rejoiced that the Church of God was so highly exalted in his person. "*All they from Sheba shall come, they shall bring forth gold and incense, and show forth the praises of the Lord;*" he thought that the old prophecy was thus fulfilled. He had yet to

learn that the God who chose a crown of thorns is best to be glorified in the fires of affliction.

And King Egfrid envied and hated him, not simply for his pomp, but because he had aided and abetted the Queen Etheldreda in her longings for the cloister: and had at last won from the reluctant husband his consent that she should take the veil from Wilfrid's hands, at S. Ebba's Convent at Coldingham.

The unwilling husband, conquered by his wife's importunities, upheld, as she was, by the whole force of Wilfrid's spiritual influence, had consented—unwillingly, and grieved at heart; but it was done, and the new vows to the Heavenly Spouse effaced the old: the marriage was declared null and void, and the King free to marry again.

He did marry—and the new Queen Ermenburga, became the deadly foe of Wilfrid, and urged her husband in every way to diminish the overbearing power of the prelate, and to lower his pride; her motives are not clear, since but for Wilfrid's action she had never been Queen.

Now Theodore, the great and good Archbishop of Canterbury, to whom England owes so much, was bent upon a partition of the huge dioceses into which England was then divided: this would involve the abatement of Wilfrid's territorial jurisdiction, and he was known to be greatly opposed to the scheme.

But it was the opportunity which, for the gratification of their own private ends, Egfrid and his Queen craved, and accordingly they invited Theo-

dore to Northumbria, in the summer of the year six hundred and seventy-eight; and in the absence of Wilfrid, and without his knowledge, drew up a plan for the division of the huge diocese, a step good and almost necessary in itself, and only blameable inasmuch as it could not be lawfully and canonically carried into effect without the consent of the existing authority. Theodore acted wrongly, inasmuch as he made use of the unhallowed hatred of the King and Queen for his own laudable ends, and so did evil that good might come.

But Wilfrid loved his diocese; he knew also, as Theodore did not, the unworthy motives which were at the bottom of the royal participation of the scheme, that there was a plan of Church spoliation in connection with it, of robbery of Church lands and other possessions: moreover, he loved each Minster he had built, each Convent he had founded; the dependent villages up each wooded glen had been visited by him, he had contracted spiritual ties in every direction, he loved his sons and daughters in the Lord as the mothers of Bethlehem their babes: the foundation of the Church in each parish, the conversion of house after house from heathenism,—nay more, remembrances of miraculous aid here and there, of visions and dreams, were bound up with each advance the Church had made: could he give up this to strangers?

Yet it is admitted on all hands that Theodore divided Wilfrid's diocese into four parts, and consecrated Bishops to three of them, leaving one

division for Wilfrid, without consulting him either as to the division itself, or the new prelates intruded upon the flock.

Wilfrid's first step was to appeal to the King in Council, to quote the canons which forbade this arbitrary proceeding: to ask what charges could be brought against him; and was told in effect that no charges were brought, no reasons to be given, but the old one—

“Stet pro ratione voluntas.”

“We will it,” said the King and Queen, scorning even to shelter themselves behind Theodore.

Then Wilfrid rose to the occasion.

“I see that justice is not to be found at the courts of Kings. I appeal, therefore, to the Mother and Mistress of Churches, to that authority whereby alone Theodore was sent to England. I appeal to the Apostolic See.”

A great hubbub followed: some cried “traitor;” others, “Let him be cast into prison;” others, “Slay him for high treason” (*læsa majestas*); others, “Banish him, and let him console himself at Rome.”

But Wilfrid hardly heard them, his manner was as that of one in a trance, abstracted from all earthly things: he saw, as in a vision, a funeral procession entering the gates of York: he saw who lay beneath that pall, covered as were the features of the dead man in the vision, and he cried aloud,—

“Unhappy men, ye laugh now, but on this very

day next year ye shall weep:" and he left the hall unmolested.

The Council of Egfrid scorned the name of Rome, but Wilfrid was an ardent lover of S. Peter's chair. It was his argument and influence which had turned the scale against the Celtic usages and discipline at the Council of Whitby, fourteen years earlier, and his whole life was devoted to maintain the supremacy of the Apostolic See; even as afterwards was that of the great S. Anselm.

We may not judge these men by our own circumstances. Rome was then the centre of Christian civilization and influence, and had given the English Church Theodore himself, to consolidate and reform the Churches of Britain, and make them the one Church of England: hence it seemed natural to him, as to S. Anselm and Becket later, to appeal to the See of S. Peter.

But others felt differently, and more as we do in these days. England's Episcopate was sufficient for her needs, and disputes should be settled by an appeal to a provincial council under Theodore himself. The reader will hardly wonder that this course did not commend itself to Wilfrid, after what had already transpired.

The month of August was nearly over, when Wilfrid, attended by a small band of nien, left his diocese, as the sun rose over the Abbey of Hexham, which he loved, and glistened in the silver billows which broke on the rock of Lindisfarne: great was the sorrow amongst his people,

and there was a peculiar force in the psalm sung at Matins that day which touched their hearts,—

*“O God, Thou hast cast us out and scattered us
abroad.”*

The exiles sought the frontier of Mercia, and after three days' travelling through the dense forests or lonely heaths, which then covered three-fourths of the soil of England, Wilfrid rested for the night at his first Benedictine foundation of Stamford, and found rest to his soul for awhile—a Goshen in the land of Egypt. There he satiated himself with prayer and sacrifice for awhile, and humbled his pride with fast and penance, faring as the lowest of the brethren, until a messenger, whom he had sent to seek King Ethelred of Mercia, announced that he would meet the Bishop at Medehamstead, now Peterborough.

There Wilfrid repaired, and beheld that glorious Abbey, destined to fall two centuries later beneath the ferocious onslaught of the Dane: there King Ethelred fell on his neck, and wept for joy, for he loved the man of God, and begged the Bishop to tarry in his kingdom, and be *their* spiritual father. But Wilfrid's heart was true to Northumbria, and bearing a commission from Ethelred to the Pope, that he would confirm the immunities and privileges of the new Abbey, he travelled onward.

From the tower of Peterborough his quick eye discerned the rising fane of Ely, over which at that time ruled the sometime Queen of Northumbria and wife of Egfrid, the great Abbess

Etheldreda. This was his next destination, for he loved the houses of God, and his song was ever,—

“Quam dilecta tabernacula Tua Domine virtutum.”

It was the very Etheldreda who, under his guidance, had left a royal throne six years earlier, and who, not feeling safe from her husband's wrath at Coldingham, had sought a home in a more distant retreat at Ely, amongst the fens, where the enthusiasm of the good Christian folk around was raising her a stately fane, for those days: albeit far beneath the magnificence of the Ely of later days, where the glorious octagonal tower looks over the waters.^a

The meeting was very affecting, and in the contemplation of the new buildings and the good work begun, Wilfrid forgot his troubles for awhile, for his was an elastic temperament, and he did not take his woes deeply to heart, ever hoping, ever trusting.

Short was his stay; the Equinoctial gales might be expected, and he would fain cross the channel before they set in.

Leaving Wilfrid to pursue his journey in peace, we will return to the foes he has left behind him, and see what they are doing. There is one whose hatred never sleeps, the Queen Ermenburga; let us enter her palace unbidden, such a palace as

^aNOTE.—The history is represented in sculpture in Ely Cathedral, which arose out of this foundation. She is represented as an Abbess with pastoral staff, the insignia of earthly royalty lying neglected behind her.

the Kings of Northumbria had then, we should hardly deem it one now, even our poor are generally better housed : a straggling wooden building upon stone foundations, a large hall for assemblies or for meals, a presence chamber for the King, a bower or small private room where Ermenburga sat surrounded by her hand maidens at ordinary times, while they knitted or spun surrounded by rude tapestry, which waved in the draught of wind.

But now she sat alone : until a knock at the door aroused her from a meditation, not of the most pleasant kind.

"The thane you sent for waits without, O Queen," said the tire-woman.

"Let him be admitted."

"It is thou, Bertwald," said the Queen : "what tidings dost thou bring?"

"Lady, I have travelled day and night since I left Medehamstead, whereto I traced the steps of the wandering Bishop."

"Could you not intercept him, or slay him by some deft arrow?"

"Impossible; he is loved too well in Mercia—they would tear me in pieces."

"Who is with him?"

"Eddi Stephani, Tatbut, and half-a-dozen other monks."

"And thou could'st not send an arrow through monkish sackcloth in the woods?"

"They were ever attended by Mercian friends from place to place. I left them in close conference with King Ethelred, who loves this Wilfrid."

"And where doth he go next?"

"To the Isle of Ely."

"Ely! why, there my predecessor, his dupe Etheldreda, resides," and her brow contracted with evil feelings: "and whither next?"

"It is reported that they will sail from Dunwich ere S. Matthew's Mass, for a place called Quentavic, in Poitou; whence they take their road for Rome."

"It is well, Bertwald, thou may'st yet intercept them; art thou a sailor?"

"Fairly good—but I never loved the sea."

"Thy reward shall be proportionate: thou must bear letters and presents to Ebroin, mayor of the Palace, to the King of Burgundy, and bribe him to detain or slay this proud prelate of ours: he has already slain one Bishop, Delphinus of Lyons; and this Wilfrid narrowly escaped, for he was present as a stripling: and he will not mind slaying another, for he rates not Bishops above other men, nor thinks their blood redder: thou hast ten days start of the rebel, and will reach Quentavic in good time: this Wilfrid shall never see Rome. Dost hear me, man? I am not accustomed to speak twice."

"Lady, I will do thine errand, but there is a conviction in my mind that we shall not succeed. He is under the protection of God, or else he possesses magical arts."

"Most likely the latter; now get about thy business, and doubt not of thy reward."

A ship well manned with rowers, as well as equipped for sailing, was in the port of Dunwich,

waiting for a fair wind :—the port exists no longer, but it was then the chief port of the East Anglians. Many ecclesiastics of high rank were there, and others of the hus-carles or household guards of the King attended to do honour to the man whom the King delighted to honour. It was one of the royal vessels—well armed, and moulded after the best nautical skill of those days.

At length the wind blew off shore, a parting scene of prayer, when, like the citizens of Miletus, many knelt in the sand, an episcopal benediction given to the slow moving vessel, and the good ship stood out into the deep.

Their intention, as Bertwald had truly told Ermenburga, was to land at Quentavic: now man proposes, but God disposes, and He had work for Wilfrid to do. So by His power, He brought in the south-west wind, and drove the vessel far to the north-east, so that for many days, seeing neither sun nor stars, they despaired of safety, all but one—who, like S. Paul of old, felt that God had given him all those who sailed with him, and comforted them with assurances of safety, until they saw the wished for shore, and with great love of the land reached Friesland, or Frisia, where Adalgis was then King.

Meanwhile Bertwald had reached Ebroin before the south-west wind set in, with his letters and presents; and that worthy, nothing loth, undertook the commisson, and watched the port day and night in vain.

He was consoled the next month, for he got an old rival into his power, another Bishop, S.

Leger of S. Antun: he tore out the prelate's eyes, split his tongue, cut his lips off, and finally his head.

Hence we see from what a fate God preserved our Wilfrid, whom Ebroin would in all probability have treated likewise: but God did not suffer the tyrant to prosper much longer, he was assassinated by one of his own followers, and ended a life of great wickedness and atrocity. The history of France during this period is a most terrible one. England under the Heptarchy, troubled as it was, was a land of peace in comparison.

Meanwhile Wilfrid was preaching the Gospel to the heathen Frisians, to whom he felt God had sent him: he was a most successful missionary, and multitudes were converted. The great Bishop argued with the Pagan priests, and confuted them in public disputations, preached in the fields, baptized in the rivers, ate and drank when he could, as if he had but one object in the world, the conversion of the Frisians: all else seemed forgotten. There, amid the gloomy flats at the mouth of the Rhine, in the bleak marshes, he kept his Christmas with his converts.

But Ebroin had learnt where Wilfrid was, and not yet satisfied with bloodshed, he sent a messenger to King Adalgis, and offered a bushel of gold coins for the Bishop alive or dead. The letter came during the Christmas festival, when the King was giving a royal feast to his nobles, and Wilfrid and his precentor Eddi, were present.

"Read the letter aloud," said the King, "that

all may know what this fox, Ebroin, has to say to me."

It was a startling letter : all looked at Wilfrid, who sat as calm as if he were quite unconcerned, with his childlike trust in God.

"Give me the letter," said Adalgis.

The King tore it into pieces, and cast it into the blazing fire. "Go," said he, to the trembling messenger, "thou art but the tool of another ; or I would send thee after it. Go and tell thy master my words : so may the God of justice rend and consume him in the day of His vengeance, who seeks innocent blood.

Even there the animosity of Ermenburga did not cease ; when Wilfrid left Frisia and sought Rome the King of Lombardy informed him that he had received similar offers, if he would arrest or slay Wilfrid ; but all in vain, he was as true as Adalgis. The little band reached Rome in safety.

We must now return to Northumbria, leaving Wilfrid amidst that ecclesiastical magnificence in which his soul delighted, the guest of the Pope, honoured, admired, representing England at the anti-Monothelite councils, saturating himself with gorgeous functions and solemn services, gratifying his eyes with architectural glories, his ears with Gregorian music ; and return to poor primitive Northumbria—a hundred degrees lower in the scale of civilization.

Yet it must be owned that our Wilfrid, although he loved those things, could both worship and work without them: he had done good work for God in the ugliest country of the world, in Batavian marshes, amongst the barbarous Frisians.

He had one deep sorrow to undergo about this period; if he loved anyone on earth, it was the Abbess Etheldreda, with a pure and holy love such as Saints may bear each other when they follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth, in the sunny land of Paradise; on the 23rd of June, in the year 679, while Wilfrid was yet at Rome, she passed away to her rest, or rather to the fuller participation of the worship of the Redeemed of the LORD, which had been her delight upon earth. We may be quite sure Wilfrid never regretted that he had aided her to exchange her royal crown for the Benedictine veil; her palace at York, for the Convent in the fen-country. Yet it had in an earthly sense been far better for him, had Etheldreda been at York instead of Ermenburga.

Let us listen to a certain lecture given one night soon after Easter of the following year, in the palace at York.

"My Lord, art thou awake?" said Queen Ermenburga.

Whensoever she called him "*my lord*" King Egfrid trembled, and he shook in his night-cap.

"How can I sleep? the wind is so high, it blows the tapestry of our chamber in all directions,

so that I thought I was on the Cheviots, in a high gale."

"Hast thou heard of that Wilfrid lately?"

"He has been at Rome, speaking in the name of all England at some council; the Saints rebuke his impudence: he is in high favour with all there, and it is quite certain that they will decree just what he wants them to decree."

"Exactly so; well, what course shalt thou take?"

"We have no room for him here: we have appointed Bosa over Daira as Bishop of York, since Wilfrid ran away: Eata, to rule over Bernicia, from that proud rebel's Minster at Hexham; Eadhed over Lindsey; he will find no corner in which to play Bishop."

"And is that all thou hast to say? if he dares to return, arrest him as a rebel, and slay him as a traitor. Theodore did all that you have just said: if he, a Bishop, did so much, you, a King, may surely do *more*."

"I hardly dare oppose myself to S. Peter's successor, lest when I knock at the door of heaven, he who hath the keys should say, 'No room for thee, O King.'"

"Then do not oppose thyself: say 'the writings have been bought: the doom corruptly obtained (whatever it may be) by misrepresentation;' so spare the Papal pride, and do as thou shalt please with this Wilfrid."

Meanwhile Wilfrid had made his petition to Rome, and his cause being really a just one, had rightly gained the day; while at the same time

the Papal Court, unwilling to disturb Theodore's good work, sanctioned the division of the unwieldy diocese. And they combined the two ends thus: they decreed at the sacred Synod, wherein fifty Bishops and Abbots were assembled as coadjutors, first, that Wilfrid should be restored to his See; secondly, that the Bishops illegally intruded should be expelled; and, thirdly, that Wilfrid should himself ordain three coadjutors in their places, in whom he personally had confidence, as his suffragans, and this under pain of excommunication to all who should oppose.

It is impossible to question the justice of this decision, but, as we shall see, it was not received in England: both the King and the Archbishop were committed to the support of the intruders, and national feeling was sure to be strongly excited in their defence. English feeling was always strongly insular: Theodore had caught the infection, and had no mind to be a mere Roman Legate; he felt himself rather "The Patriarch of the British Isles,"—a great man, a holy man, but one who *would* be chief in his own sphere.

As for the motives of Egfrid and Ermenburga, the less said about them the better: God gave the final answer, if we read the lessons of history aright, at Dunnechtan.

News arrived at last that Wilfrid had landed and betaken himself in the first place to his dear Monks at Hexham, who had been "crying to the LORD with tears" (as his biographer says) for his

return. Next, he repaired to the court and exhibited his treasured document with its "bulla and apostolical seal" to King Egfrid; who received him with stately coldness, and ironical smiles, and said that parliament (witan) should be assembled to receive the communication with due honour.

They met; all the princes, but few servants of God; none saluted Wilfrid, none offered him the respect due to their spiritual father; so when, amidst sneers and the like, silence was obtained, Wilfrid craved permission to read his "letters" aloud.

He began:

"The Sacred Synod ('is it more sacred than that of Canterbury?') unanimously consented ('how much did each man get?') to this. We do ordain and decree ('who cares what foreigners decree, let them order their own people,') that the holy Bishop ('very holy,') be restored to the bishopric which he lately possessed."

No more could be read: loud cries were heard: they began near the King's throne.

"The writings were bought!"

"The doom was corruptly obtained!"

"Throw him into prison!"

"Strip him of his vestments!"

At last the cries were hushed; the commanding figure of Egfrid towered above them from the podium on which the throne was placed:

"He called across the tumult, and the tumult fell."

"We waste time crying out like angry children, let the question be put to the vote: has Wilfrid

bribed the tribunal across the sea, in your opinion ? ”

Every hand was raised, including (shame to say) the three intruding Bishops, for there was no sort of proof, nor probably did any one believe in the charge, or why did they not send to Rome to ascertain the fact ?

Then said the King, “ We do sentence him to be stripped of all, save the clothes he wears, and to be cast into prison for nine months, after which he may go whither he will ; only if he set foot in Northumbria again he shall suffer death as a traitor.”

That was the signal for universal acclamations of joy : and the three Bishops acquiesced in the resolution (says Eddi) “ without any token of regret.”

They stripped him of his raiment : Wilfrid thought of Him of whom it is written, “ They parted My raiment among them.” He had a wonderful reliquary, full of relics which he had collected from Rome and elsewhere : Ermenburga who was present asked for it ; and had it, thinking it a sort of talisman.

“ I shall hang it beside me in my carriage when I ride, so shall my horses never stumble ; and in my chamber while I sleep, so shall I be safe from storm and tempest,” said this superstitious yet irreligious Queen.

“ And I swear,” said Egfrid, “ that he shall be kept in solitary confinement, and that none of his friends, or fellow-traitors, shall visit him.”

One parting interview craved they, and it was reluctantly allowed.

Wilfrid was the calmest person there: the Psalm "*Qui habitat*" was in his heart and lips.

"Be mindful of the days of old, and tell my brethren how we read of the afflictions of Israel in Egypt, and of the Saints of whom the world was not worthy, who wandered in sheep-skins and goat-skins, destitute, afflicted and tormented: and seeing we are surrounded by such a cloud of witnesses, let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Him who bore the Cross for us." Such was the burden of his parting words.

They imprisoned him in the Castle of Brunanburg, of which Offrith was the Reeve or Governor: there was little light even in the day time, and no lamp or fire was allowed.—Such were the King's orders.

But, like the keeper of the prison into which Potiphar cast Joseph, Offrith feared God, and although he dared not utterly neglect the commands of the angry King, he did all in his power to lighten the burden of the imprisonment: his was a coarse spirit they say, but the very contact with holiness produced a strange moral effect upon him. Day by day they heard Wilfrid reciting the Psalter: and although he was denied light, God gave it him, for his keepers saw a bright radiance from within shining through the crevice of the door, and fled in terror. Offrith would fain have removed his saintly prisoner to a

better cell, but dared not, for the King wanted to crush Wilfrid's spirit.

But the captive minded it not, the sweet consolations of the HOLY SPIRIT can make darkness light, and illuminate either a loathsome dungeon of the seventh century, or a dying bed of the nineteenth,—and so Wilfrid found it: he was as happy as the day is long.

At length the King came to see his prisoner, and with the gaoler entered the cell: Wilfrid looked his tyrant calmly in the face.

"Art thou humbled; is thy proud spirit yet tamed?"

"CHRIST humbled me long ago, when I bowed my neck to His yoke."

"Wilt thou then submit to thy King, and acknowledge the justice of thy sentence?"

"I would sooner lose my head."

"That may yet come," said the King, and left the cell.

Now Offrith's wife was afflicted with a sore disease, which ended in the formation of a large abscess: and afterwards she had a fit in which she lay speechless, and cold like a corpse. Her husband, despairing of human aid, ran to his prisoner, who came, prayed, sprinkled holy water over her, whereupon she arose and gave thanks to God.

It will easily be believed that Offrith could not bear to be Wilfrid's gaoler after this, so he went to the King, and besought him to keep so holy a man no longer in captivity.

"Thou art a tender-hearted fool," said the

King ; " thy Saint shall go to the town of Dunbar, whereof Tydlin is governor : *he* is of sterner stuff."

And so it took place that Wilfrid was carried from Brunanburgh to Dunbar : the facts which followed might be doubted, only they are related by Wilfrid's faithful friend and follower, Eddi Stephani.

Tydlin cast the Bishop into a cold, damp dungeon, and loaded him with heavy chains, or rather tried to do so, for God worked a miracle on behalf of His servant.

Take the measure as he would, Tydlin could hardly get any fetters to fit Wilfrid : either they seemed too large, and fell off, or too small and would not go on, or if they fitted they snapped asunder.

"No wonder," says Eddi ; "how should the feet that bore the glad tidings of the Gospel be bound, or the hands which poured the saving water of Baptism wear manacles ?" Dear, loving Eddi, such a biographer after a more saintly fashion was he to Wilfrid, as Boswell to Dr. Johnson of later days, full of veneration for his hero, and we love him for it.

And still Wilfrid sang Psalms like the Saints of old.

Meanwhile the royal pair, Egfrid and Ermenburga, were living in luxury and ease ; like Queen Elizabeth of later days, they were fond of making "progresses" about their dominions, living on the fat of the land, while Wilfrid fed on bread and water, and had not so much as a grating

whence to look over the wild North Sea. At last the royal pair came to the Convent of Coldingham, whereof S. Ebba,^b the aunt of Egfrid, was yet Abbess.

The Queen had her stolen reliquary upon her person.

"Whence hast thou that precious 'Chris-marium?'" asked the Abbess.

The Queen, in spite of her boldness, blushed ; she was afraid of the Abbess, if not of the Bishop. Such women often fear their own sex most.

"It was Wilfrid's," whispered the King, "he got it from Rome."

"Alas, poor niece," said the Abbess, "dost thou really think stolen goods will protect thee from evil, or that there is protection in holy bones for an unconverted and evil heart?"

And that same night the Queen was taken very ill at the Convent, in a short time was delirious, and began to rave about Wilfrid. Now she imagined all the Saints whose bones she had stolen were scourging her ; and her screams aroused the whole house.

So it continued until the Abbess said solemnly to Egfrid :

"Dost thou not see, my nephew, that the Saints, whose relics she has stolen, indeed fight against her ? How hath she profaned their names ! Release the Bishop, or she will die."

So Egfrid gave way, sent to release the Bishop, offering him the restoration of some portion of his

^bQuery the S. Ebbe of Oxford notoriety?

See if he would submit, and acknowledge that the sentence was just, otherwise giving him simply his liberty, upon condition that he should go into exile.

Wilfrid of course refused to accept the Bishopric on these conditions, which would have been an acknowledgment that he was wrong throughout, and had really "bought his letters from Rome;" and instead he accepted an invitation from Berthwald, the nephew of the King of Mercia, to build and settle a monastery there.

And when he left prison the Queen recovered.

Then Wilfrid departed to Mercia, where the people received him gladly: rest was welcome to his soul, and he commenced to build a little monastery.

Egfrid crossed the border, and ravaged the Mercian territory with his customary ferocity: on the banks of the winding Trent, near Nottingham, the hastily summoned levies of the invaded land withstood him: a fierce battle ensued, and Alwin, the brother of Egfrid, a youth of only eighteen years, was slain. The Northumbrians were defeated, but they fought for the body of the young prince, and bore it home with much lamentation, and dirges dire; and as it entered the City of York, amidst the cries and grief of the citizens, who rent their garments and wailed bitterly, a loud voice exclaimed:

"Remember the words of our true Bishop, Wilfrid, how he told us just a year ago that we who laughed then, should mourn on this very day."

It was exactly a year since Wilfrid's expulsion. This was the first blow.

But Ermenburga repented not: her animosity still followed the Bishop: Ethelred, who had succeeded Wulfhere, as King of Mercia, had married Osthryd, the sister of Egfrid, and the King and Queen commanded the Bishop to leave Mercia, and all he was doing for God there, at a day's notice.

Then the persecuted exile took up his burden again and travelled southward into Wessex, where the Bishop of Dorchester received him gladly, and we can imagine the weary, way-worn Saint wrapped in sweet communion with God as he wandered pondering many things, amidst the verdant meadows which border the rivers Isis and Tame, or perhaps from the mounds of Synodune gazing upon the land so lately redeemed from the cruel service of Woden and Thor. Classic Oxford was *not* then: Dorchester was the ecclesiastical centre, ere the Danes ravaged the country, and successive calamities ruined the older city, so that men forsook the site of the ancient bishopric.

But in a short time the avenging furies of a jealous Queen found him out again: Kentwin, King of Wessex, had Ermenburga's own sister to wife: the reader will easily understand how the sisters took counsel, and the King, Kentwin, commanded Wilfrid to resume his journey.

But God had so ordered that this new banish-

ment led to the most glorious chapter in Wilfrid's life. He went to Sussex, yet unconverted, and crossed the forest of the Andredsweald, which separated the folk of that country from the rest of the island, and had cut them off from the civilising and yet higher agencies, which were transforming England into the "Isle of Saints."

He threw all his soul into the work which he saw God had reserved for him, and as in Frisia so in Sussex, did God own his work. The conversion of Sussex was one of the brightest pages in the history of the century: the wild mysterious forest, stretching itself into Kent on the one side and Hampshire on the other, was rarely crossed; the work of S. Augustine on the east, and S. Birinus on the west, had hardly been heard of in the isolated kingdom, penned in between the sea and the wood. The King, Ethelwalch, was indeed a Christian, and he had invited a few Irish Monks over, who were settled at Bosham, near Chichester, but they had laboured in vain: "not one of the country people cared even to listen to their preaching." With Wilfrid's arrival all was speedily changed, and after a few months' instruction, the whole people were baptized. It was the close of a long period of drought, threatening famine: and the day of the great general Baptism the rain of heaven fell copiously, the people gave thanks to God who laved the thirsty land, and—"He gave them their meat in due season."

The next scene of his labours was the Isle of

Wight, which had been given to Ethelwalch, King of Sussex, but was forcibly re-annexed to Wessex by Ceadwalla, who at Wilfrid's intercession ceased to slaughter the natives, and allowed the work of conversion to begin. So that the little island, the last haunt of paganism, was now conquered by CHRIST.

So passed away from England the awful shadow of Odin, and Thor, the war-god, whose worship was bloodshed, to whom thousands of human victims had been immolated. The work begun by Augustine was completed by Wilfrid, and the light of the Gospel had reached the last fastnesses of a cruel and sanguinary Creed.

But we are anticipating; the bolt of heaven had fallen upon Egfrid and Ermenburga, and the way was prepared for Wilfrid's return to his beloved York.

Yielding to the lust of conquest, Egfrid had invaded Ireland in the year 604, and had devastated that island, then friendly to England, with a most cruel devastation, so that neither Church nor Monastery was spared: whereupon the poor people, unable to defend themselves, called piteously upon God to avenge them of their adversaries; and although (says Bede) those who curse shall not inherit the kingdom of God, yet those who are deservedly cursed for their impiety quickly pay the penalty of their sin to Him who has said, "*Vengeance is Mine, I will repay.*"

So far from repenting, in the very next year Egfrid led an army into Scotland, to serve the

Picts after the same fashion, in spite of the protests of his clergy, and especially of S. Cuthbert, then Bishop of Lindisfarne, who besought him in vain not to carry fire and sword into a land which had given no provocation.

It was the afternoon of Saturday, the 20th of May, in the year 685, and a mighty host was entering the gorges of a deep mountain path in pursuit of a flying foe. It was the host of Egfrid, the defile was the "*Defile of Dunnechtan*."

He had met wondrous apparent success; it seemed a case of "*veni, vidi, vici*;" the enemy had retreated before him everywhere; he had crossed the Forth, the northern boundary of his kingdom, for Northumbria then extended over the Lowlands of Scotland as far as Edinburgh; he had even crossed the Tay unopposed, and the Picts had retreated into their mountains, whither, under the infatuation of success, he pursued them against the advice of his counsellors. But the same fate overtook him which had befallen Varus and Valerius in ancient days: suddenly the advanced guard found an entrenchment in front, from behind which a tempest of death-dealing darts and stones saluted them, so that no valour could carry it, while the hill sides swarmed with foes, who, suddenly appearing, rolled huge masses of stone upon the invaders. The King pressed to the

front, and foremost fighting fell: the defeated panic-stricken invaders strove to retreat, but found another huge barrier thrown up behind. It was annihilation.

On the same afternoon S. Cuthbert was at Carlisle, and after Nones he walked upon the old Roman wall looking towards the north, with the Reeve and many other folk, eager to do him honour. They were near an old fountain, the work of the departed Romans, when all at once the Bishop paused as one in a trance, and seemed strangely agitated. Nature as if in sympathy became over-cast, dark clouds were swept by the wind over the sky and obscured the sun.

"Alas!" he said, "it is all over: the war is waged, the battle done."

They were alarmed.

"What has happened, Father?"

"The weather has changed; so the fortunes of men are overcast: how inscrutable are the judgments of God! and His ways past finding out. Where is the Queen?"

"In the Convent, within the walls."

He sought Ermenburga.

"Lady," he said: "return to York on Monday, it is too late to-day, and on the Lord's day none may travel: to-morrow I go to dedicate the Church of a Monastery hard by, and will follow thee."

"But why should I leave Carlisle?" asked the Queen; "I purpose tarrying here until I receive news of my husband."

"Thou wilt hear them all too soon."

"What dost thou mean?"

"Perchance he has fallen, the curse of the unhappy Irish pursues him."

"Impossible;" and then the strong-minded woman, oppressed by dread forebodings, trembled before him.

"God pity and pardon *thee*," said the Saint, and left her.

For he had seen as in a trance the final scene at the Defile of Dunnechtan.

The sermon of S. Cuthbert on that Sunday was on the subject of tribulation: showing how it worketh patience, and that through much affliction must we enter the kingdom of God: people wondered at the intense earnestness with which he pressed the subject, and some said, "Does he expect a return of the pestilence?" none suspected the truth.

But on the Monday arrived a way-worn and terror-stricken fugitive, who brought the terrible news of the slaughter. They brought him to the Queen, who had not yet departed.

"*The host has perished: the King is slain: and I alone have escaped to tell thee*," was the terrible burden of his message.

She spake not, nor uttered a cry.

Her son Prince Aldfrid, himself unmanned, brought consolation in vain.

"Fallen, fallen, and only in his fortieth year, in the prime of his strength: Oh Wilfrid, Wilfrid!"

"The curse of the Irish has overtaken him," men said.

She never lifted up her head again, but hastened to bury her sorrows in a Convent, where we are told the lioness became a lamb, and where we doubt not she learned to realize the deep teaching of S. Cuthbert's sermon on that last Sunday she ever spent in the "*world*," e'er the deep sorrow came upon her which taught her to look to the Cross.

The remainder of our story is brief; Northumbria fell with Egfrid: as Bede says, "From this cause the hope and vigour of the kingdom of the Angles began to flow away." First Mercia, then Wessex, began to hold the supremacy; and in the latter it eventually rested.

Struck by the manner in which God had blessed the work of Wilfrid, Theodore felt that he had unjustly wronged a chosen servant of their common Master: he sought reconciliation. They met in the house of Bishop Erconwald, in London.

Labouring under a presentiment that his time was brief, Theodore acknowledged the wrong he had done Wilfrid, and entreated pardon; expressed his wish that his injured brother should succeed him in the Primacy, but Wilfrid rejoined that Northumbria was dearer to him than any other sphere of labour on earth.

Then the Archbishop wrote to the son and successor of Egfrid, King Aldfrid, and besought him to receive Bishop Wilfrid back again. Eala

of Hexham was dead, and Wilfrid entered upon that See, and recovered his beloved Minster. And shortly afterwards he regained possession of the Cathedral for which he had been consecrated, that of York, on the retirement of Bishop Bosa.

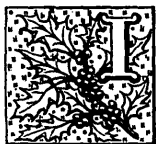
And there we must leave him, his life of affliction was not yet over, but for the present the desire of his heart was gratified. He was at home.





The First Fruits of the Wight.

A.D. 686.



, ACCA, Priest of the Thane, Hundwald, and of the Westmeonwaras, his folk, desiring to preserve to them that come after us some record of the sad and pitiful events which have occurred amongst us in these days, write this record in the year of grace six hundred and eighty-six, in a time of deep snow, which prevents my going about amongst the flock which the LORD hath committed to my charge.

The Thane, Hundwald, was a heathen until four years since, when he was converted by the preaching of the Apostle of Sussex, S. Wilfrid—our Wilfrid, who, banished from York by the malice of King Egfrid and his Queen, has brought the faith of the Gospel into these dark regions; for so hath the LORD appointed to bring good out of evil.

Now when the noble Thane was converted, he asked the Bishop, "*What reward shall I give unto the Lord for all the benefits He hath done unto me?*" and the Bishop replied, "*Give tithes of all that thou hast, and He shall reward thee seven-fold.*" Then said Hundwald, "How shall I bestow them?" and was answered: "Build thou a Church on thy lands, and endow it with the tithe for the support of a Priest, who shall convert thy people, and bring them to the True Light, which is CHRIST."

And Hundwald departed rejoicing, for he had great possessions: so he built a Church amongst the Westmeonwaras, and appointed me, Acca, to be his Mass-Priest.

And here have I laboured for four years, during which I have, by God's blessing, baptized every man, woman, and child on the domain, not without preaching in season, and out of season; and it must be owned that it was not without much persuasion that the people gave up their old pagan sorceries, and doctrines of devils.

We are all Jutes, for this district was from the first settled by our forefathers, who also conquered the Wight from the Welsh, and destroyed the natives, in the dark, cruel days of heathenism. The folk to the west and north of us are the Gewissas, or West Saxons, and to the east of us the South Saxons, or folk of Sussex, but lately subjugated to the yoke of the Gospel through the preaching of Wilfrid.

Only there is still remaining some of that jealousy between us and our neighbours, which the Saxon folk ever feel towards strangers, alien

in blood. The only kinsfolk we have are the Jutes in the Wight, and their King, Atwald, has ever been reckoned by us to be our King also, although we could never on the mainland maintain our independence of either Sussex or Wessex; sometimes the *one*, sometimes the *other* has borne rule over us.

The great downs rise between us and the sea to the south, and we lie in a sort of bird's nest beneath them, shut out from the world; and if only we could go on quietly serving God, and earning our bread by the sweat of our brows, oh how happy should we be!

Every LORD's day our folk assemble in the Church; it is built solidly of oak, and finely thatched with reeds: there they hear the Mattin song and the holy Mass with much devotion, and I expound the Gospels to them; they listen with great delight to its sweet stories; then, after noon-tide, we catechize the young, and teach them the Pater Noster, and the Credo, and the Commandments, in their native tongue; the older people assemble and listen to the instruction, after which we sing Evensong. Our music is very rough; but since Theodore came into England to be our Archbishop, the folk all over the land have begun to learn the sweet, solemn music taught by our father, Gregory, of old, who sent us Baptism. I learned it from the famous precentor, Eddi, surnamed Stephen, who followed the holy Wilfrid, like his shadow, wherever he went, and who himself learned it at Rome. Eddi was Wilfrid's own precentor, and sang like one of the angelic choir. Ah,

you should hear our folk sing, louder than years ago they shouted their war-cry: it fills me with joy when I think how the feet, once swift to shed blood, now tread the way of peace; how destruction and unhappiness were in their ways, but they now have the fear of God before their eyes. And some have been called more especially to follow God in holy virginity, and a Sisterhood is already established down the valley, where they sing the praises of God seven times a day, and where the holy Mass is said daily.

It is like Eden.

But a serpent crept into Eden, and we have a great serpent about here, with glittering scales.

His name is Cædwalla, and he is King of Wessex. He calls himself a Christian, but he loves strife and bloodshed as much as any Viking; and now that he has not long since become King of the Gewissas, he covets the island we call Wihtea or the Wight^a also, and has made war on the pretence that they are all heathen, promising to give a fourth part of the land, and the folk thereon, to CHRIST.

I doubt whether our Lord will accept such a gift; His weapons are not those of this world.

One day the Thane, Hundwald, came riding up to my home; it was in the late summer.

"Acca," he said, "father, come up the hill with me, I have a horse to take thee up."

And truly one of his thralls led a horse ready caparisoned.

^a Isle of Wight.

I mounted and we rode together, beneath the shade of the beeches, then higher and higher.

"Why is thy countenance fallen, my lord?" I said.

"Because of my poor kinsfolk in the Wight; thou wilt soon see."

And in a few minutes we gained the summit of the mighty hill. What a view lay before us! A few miles below lay Portaccaster, where *Port*, the Sea King, and his two sons, Bæda and Mœgla, landed one hundred and eighty-five years ago, slaying a British chieftain of high rank, at the head of his followers, and taking possession.

Across the strait we saw the lovely island the Romans called "*Vectis*," and we the "*Wight*;" and at once I also perceived why the Thane had brought me up the hill. The smoke of the country was ascending like the smoke of a furnace. Oh, why had they not yet received the Gospel, ere the day of the Lord came upon them, as upon Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of their visitation.

"Alas, we can do nought for them," said he.

"Nought," said I, "but let us seek counsel of God."

We all prayed and pondered in silence, until at last a voice seemed to whisper in mine ear:—

"Send messengers to Wilfrid: this Cædwalla holds him in reverence, and will be moved to mercy by him alone."

"My lord," I said, "wilt thou send to Wintanceaster? Wilfrid is the guest of the Bishop Hedda, and will doubtless journey to the coast at once, and beseech the King to stay the shedding

of innocent blood, which has already begun over there."

"Begun! I fear it is half over; but I will send instantly. Wilt thou ride thither with me? We may return by nightfall."

"Let us delay no longer," and, descending the hill, we rode for Wintanceaster, distant about twelve miles, and dimly visible in the north-west.

We reached the city in about two hours, the riding was rough, the roads difficult; and dismounting before the Cathedral, which Bishop Wini built with foundations of stone and wooden superstructure, met the people coming from Even-song.

"The Bishops will both be there, if in the city," said I.

And so they were, and we met them coming out of the sacristy. Wilfrid with his sweet smile, full of power was his face, and winning authority which none could resist; ah, well do we know that long thin face, deeply furrowed with care, those deep-set eyes, so bright and piercing, as if they could read men's thoughts: those saintly features, that silvery voice, clear as a bell. Well, he won me to God, and I love Wilfrid.

"My father, my more than father," I said, and knelt and kissed the hem of his alb, for he had come from the Church, still vested in alb and girdle, over which he had thrown a light purple cloak, called a cappa.

"Acca, my son, is it thou?"

"My father," I cried, "Cædwalla is slaying the

poor people of Wight, we can see the flames which consume their dwellings from our hills."

"Has he indeed begun? he promised me that he would reconsider the matter; it was all I could gain."

"He has indeed."

"Then must I go to stay the effusion of blood, albeit they be not yet of the true fold; Hedda, my brother, a horse, I beseech thee."

"But thou must have an escort, the country is dangerous," said the Bishop of Wessex.

"They will not harm me."

"We will be your escort," said Hundwald.

"It is well, I shall take two brethren with me, and we shall be ready in half an hour, when we will make what speed we may."

"And come in and eat and drink, ye know not when ye may get your next meal, all of you," said Hedda.

And so we enter the Bishop's house hard by the Cathedral, and ate and drank. Hundwald is a true Englishman, naught baulks his appetite.

In half an hour Wilfrid, attended by two brethren, one of whom was Eddi, who taught me the holy chant of the Mass, which an angel brought down to Gregory straight from the celestial choir; and we all rode for the coast.

On the way we discoursed of many holy things, when the road permitted; there is an old Roman road from the Bishop's city to the head of the Estuary,^b and it was easier travelling than we had had on our journey to the "Bishop's stool."

^b Southampton Water.

One of the brethren was the Priest Eappa, from Selsea, and he told me how the LORD had lately visited them. In their Monastery there was a little Saxon boy, lately baptized and full of grace, like Timothy. Now that awful scourge, the yellow fever, visited the brethren as it swept through England ; and many died, both brethren and converts, so that they ordained a fast of three days to implore the LORD to turn His wrath away : now this dear lad lay sick at the time, and on the second day of the fast, the blessed Apostles S. Peter and S. Paul appeared to him by his bedside.

“Fear not to die, dear child,” they said, “for this very day must thou depart to the heavenly Kingdom ; but thou must stay till the Mass is said, and receive the Body and Blood of the LORD, so that in the strength of that meat thou mayest go, even unto the mount of God. Call therefore the Priest Eappa, and tell him that the LORD has heard your prayers and devotion ; that not one more shall die of the plague in the Monastery or neighbourhood save yourself, who shall this day be delivered by death, and be taken to Paradise to see the LORD JESUS CHRIST, whom thou hast served ; and that this favour God has vouchsafed through the intercession of His dear servant King Oswald, of Northumbria, who this very day was killed in battle with the infidels, and taken up into the everlasting joy of heaven. Let them then celebrate Masses in memory of King Oswald, and in gratitude for their deliverance cease to

fast, and refresh themselves with food,"—so they departed.

"The boy called for me," said Eappa, "and told me the story: I looked in my Chronicle and found that Oswald was indeed slain thirty-nine years ago, on that very day. We then called the brethren, caused Mass to be said in honour of that blessed Saint and Martyr, wherein all communicated, and we carried the Viaticum to the sick boy. He received it with humble faith, and yielded his soul thereupon to God."

"Did any one else die?" asked I.

"Not one. But ever since that day we have numbered Oswald among the Saints, and say Mass in his honour on the day of his martyrdom."

In such like talk we reached the head of the Estuary, on the north of which is Cerdic's ore, where old Cerdic, the founder of Wessex, landed; there we parted, Wilfred and his two companions sailed down the Estuary in a great ship, lent by the Reeve, for the island, and we stood on the shore and watched their departure.

It was an awful sight, the island was seen in the distance ruddy with flames, which cast a bright shining light upon the water, a brilliant trackway stretching at our feet.

And while we watched we saw a boat with three people in her, cross the bright track: and wondered who they might be. Shortly afterwards we heard the beaching of a boat, and seeking news from the island, Hundwald and I went to the spot.

A venerable looking bard, with beard white as snow descending to his waist, stood on the shore, helping two boys to land; when he saw us, he turned round, and said,—

“Are ye friends or foes to the unfortunate?”

“Friends always, so we fulfil the law of CHRIST.”

“Ye are Christians then,” said the bard doubtfully; “but we are in your power, without either strength to fight or fly, we flee from yonder burning.”

“Then have you found friends,” said Hundwald; “we also are Jutes, your kindred.”

“Are ye Meonwaras?”

“We are, follow us, we will shelter you. Who are these two poor boys?”

“They are—may I trust you? yes, I will—yet Cædwalla would give much to the man who should betray them, but ye are kindred.”

“Trust begets trust,” said Hundwald, “we are brethren.”

“Then they are the Princes of Wight.”

“The sons of the King, Atwald?”

“Even so.”

“King-lings,” said the Thane; “fear not, he shall strike me first who injures you, I will stand by you to the end. And now, what shall be done? lo! I have land close by here at a place they call Stony-ham: there they may find immediate succour with the ceorl who farms it for me. Come, my boys, mount behind us, one behind each; I would I had a horse for you too, old man.”

So the two boys mounted, one behind the Thane and one behind me, and we rode to Stony-ham, so called from a huge stone in the centre of the village, in the Latin tongue "*Ad Lapidem*," and the old bard walked by our side.

We said nothing, made no enquiries until after a short ride we reached the farm. It was now nearly midnight, and the dogs received us noisily, opposing our entrance: the people woke up, and came out to see what was amiss, and recognized their lord with surprise, yet with pleasure, for Hundwald was a good master. We were soon under shelter, and food was set before the fugitives; they could hardly touch it at first, but we had the pleasure to see them eat at last, and then we got the two poor boys into a comfortable bed, and forgetting their troubles, they were soon fast asleep.

They were fine, strong, handsome boys, with the darker features of the Jutish race, king-like, born to command. The elder only about thirteen, and the other a year younger; their names were Frithgar and Wulfgar.

The old bard, who had been high in the confidence of the pagan King, Atwald, the singer of "*Sagas*," or war-songs, and teller of stories of the heroes of old, around the winter hearth, sat up with us around the fire, which burned in the centre of the hall: for a time we sat silently watching the smoke ascending towards the gap in the summit of the roof: we three, Hundwald, the bard, and I.

At last Hundwald asked:

"How camest thou hither?"

The bard looked him full in the face.

"Listen, O kinsman, and thine ears shall drink in no lies. The father of these boys is Atwald, King of Wihtea, which some call Wight. Yestereve we were all gathered together for the last time at the old castle-fortress of Wiht-garas-byrg,^c built long ago by the men who were before us. Cædwalla and the men of Wessex, aided by some rebellious Wihtwaras (men of Wight), who were sons of Loki,^d had already conquered the eastern part of the island, and the last stand had to be made in the valley between the downs, beneath the castle heights. We were outnumbered, and Atwald only thought to die, sword in hand, as a King should die; so before he issued forth to fight his last fight, he sent for me, and bade me take charge of his boys: he told me to seek a boat, and descend the river with the tide, unto the Solente, and to cross the sea in hope of finding refuge with our kindred the Meonwaras; 'For,' said he, 'it is the only chance of saving my sons, and they may live and avenge me, so that I may yet drink wine in Valhalla, from the skull of this Cædwalla.' So we waited until the battle was lost, and tidings had arrived that the King had been slain, when, ere the foe could fight his way up to the height whereon the castle stood, I took the King-lings and led them forth, albeit they prayed to stay and die with their father. I told them that if they loved him they must obey his

^c Carisbrooke.

^d "Loki," an evil being of gigantic power.

will, and we went forth together. We took a boat on the river, beneath the hill, and, favoured by growing darkness, glided down unobserved by the foe, so we reached the sea; and here we are, happy to have found our kindred, albeit ye have come to believe in that CHRIST in whose Name Cædwalla fights."

"Many bear His Name, who follow not His precepts, nor keep His commandments," said I; "this Cædwalla is not even yet baptized, scarce a catechumen."

"Sleep now," said Hundwald, "and on the morrow I will take you to my distant hall under the downs, where none will seek to harm you."

So we all slept.

The place where we were sheltered was a farm house, surrounded by out-buildings: on the one side a deep brook, on the other fields, surrounded by thick woods, and dotted here and there by huts, wherein the thralls lived; and amidst them a Church built half a century since, when the holy Birinus paused on his road northward, and converted the southern Gewissas, ere he sought the banks of the Thames, and Dorcic,^e where his holy bones now rest.

Now in the morn when we were about to start, the ceorl Witta, who held this farm as the tenant of Hundwald, brought us news that it was reported that the sons of the King of Wight had landed on the coast, and were concealed in the country, and that already the Reeve^f had ordered a search to be made, and set a price upon their

^e Dorchester on Tame.

^f Shire-reeve, hence Sheriff.

heads: so that he advised we should not stir forth until the cover of night was spread over the earth once more.

We were grieved at his news, but thought it safer to remain, as he had said all the roads were watched; and we thought none knew of our arrival in the dead of the night.

Meanwhile I thought I might make acquaintance with the boys, whom I purposed to bring into the Fold of CHRIST with as little delay as might be.

"Tell me your names, my children," I said, as we sat by the fire together, for it was a damp and chilly morning.

"I am Frithgar, son of the King," said the elder, proudly.

"And I, Wulfgar, his brother."

"Now tell me how you came hither?"

The boys' eyes flashed.

"That wolf Cædwalla is ravaging the island, and our brave father went out as a King should to fight him; would he had let me go too."

"Nay, my child, thou art too young."

"I can wield a sword, bend a bow, and the like; besides, I should have died by his side, and gone to Valhalla with him."

"Have you a mother?"

"She died long ago," said the younger, sadly.

"And we have none left to live for; but there is one thing which methinks makes life worth living," said the elder.

"And what is that, my child?"

"Vengeance: I would live to slay the man who

has slain my father. I may yet be King of Wight: but they are destroying all our folk, and burning their poor houses; there will be none left for me to rule; and yet they loved us."

There the brave boy forgot his courage, and began to cry; and the younger one joined him.

Poor lads, I could have shed a tear too, and I think I did, over the desolate orphans, but it was not a time yet to speak the Faith of CHRIST: I waited awhile, and left them till their grief had spent itself.

At last I returned and told them of One who had called Himself the "Father of the fatherless," and who would like them to be His dear children; and by degrees I told them the old old story of Him who died to save; they were soon interested, and at last I began to speak to them about the life to come.

"Tell me," said the elder, "where is my father now, if all you say is true? he worshipped not your CHRIST."

God forgive me, I knew not what to say; I heard of one who asked a like question just as he was going into the Font, and when the Priest replied, "In hell," he said, "What is good enough for him is good enough for me," and died unbaptized.

I feared a like result; then I remembered how it is written, "that he who knew not the Master's will and did it not, should be beaten with few stripes," and I replied:

"My dear children, leave him to the mercy of God, who made him and can never be unjust.

Had he learnt what you now learn, he had perchance been a Christian : God is merciful to sins of ignorance."

In such conversation the day wore away : and the evening drew on dark and stormy, huge masses of cloud were rising from the sea in the west, as we prepared for our long ride home, little dreaming how it was to be interrupted : man proposes, but God disposes.

Now there lived on the farm belonging to Hundwald, a wicked thrall, named Gubba. He had been an idle and discontented man from youth upwards, in nought content with the state of life unto which God had called him ; although the blessed Paulh ad said, "*Art thou called being a slave ? seek not to be free.*"

He had often been deservedly punished for idleness and disobedience, and even for theft, for he was possessed by a devil : the devil of avarice. He who of old entered into Judas Iscariot, and made him commit that most foul of all foul treacheries.

And he now entered into the heart of this Gubba, who being asleep in his hut, was awakened by the barking of the loud-mouthed hounds, and looked forth into the night : as ill fate would have it, the moon just then shone from behind the dark clouds, and Gubba saw the fugitives enter the farm-house, and recognized his lord and master, Hundwald.

The next day messages reached the Shire-reeve from the King Cædwalla, that he had defeated and slain the unfortunate King of Wight, but that certain folk had escaped by crossing the Solente, amongst them the two sons of the King. The Reeve was bidden to offer a reward for their discovery, and to threaten the doom of death to those who should conceal them.

Now this reward was sufficient to purchase the freedom of a thrall, and make him a ceorl with a hide of land. No wonder, then, that when Gubba heard the crier making proclamation, Satan entered into his covetous heart, and his wicked eye twinkled.

It is a frightful thing to be a Judas ; but of this Gubba recked not when he sold innocent blood. Red haired, with deep sunken eyes, the wretched thrall looked like the arch betrayer himself, as I saw him pictured upon the walls of the refectory in Wilfrid's Monastery at Selsea, where I was priested.

So he went to the Reeve and said :

“ Lo ! I know where the men be hidden whom ye seek, and if ye come, I will show them unto you.”

The Reeve, nothing loth, took with him a guard of men, with lanterns and weapons, for it was getting dark, and started for the farm of Witta, coerl and tenant under Hundwald : he took two big mastiffs to hunt us if need be : alas ! his feet were swift to shed blood.

So after nightfall, when we were about to depart from the farm-house for the hall of Hundwald,

with the young King-lings of Wight, the dogs by their loud barking announced the coming of the foe.

We had heard of the reward which was offered, and at once feared that we were betrayed, although it passed our poor wits who could have been the Judas.

"Mount and fly," said Hundwald.

"Too late," said the ceorl, just entering, "the farm is surrounded."

"I will cut my way through," said Hundwald, drawing his sword; "are our horses at the door?"

The brave boys did not look frightened.

"Let us go, I have a sword and can fight too," said the elder, "let us dash through them like warriors."

Outside the door stood three swift horses, and without waiting a moment we mounted, one of the Princes behind the Thane, and the other riding behind me: the strong spirited horses, pawing to devour the way, could well carry double; light weights were the poor boys.

In less time than it takes to write it, we were out of the yard, and then we saw a group of men approaching with lights and weapons: they spread to intercept us: we dashed through, and might have escaped, but a miscreant caitiff with an arrow wounded the Thane's horse in the fore leg, so that after a few vain attempts to keep up and onward, the gallant steed stumbled and fell, throwing both riders heavily.

So rapid was our motion, that we others were already a bow shot ahead: the bard and I might

have escaped with the younger boy Wulfgar, but the gallant lad cried out: "Stay! stay! I will not leave my brother, we will live or die together; he is all I have left now."

And I did not wish to leave my lord, neither did the old bard care to escape alone. So we yielded ourselves prisoners, and were led back to the house: Hundwald was sorely bruised.

"My lord," I said, "art thou hurt?"

"Nay, but that accursed miscreant! oh! these poor boys! I care not a rye-straw for myself."

Frithgar was not hurt: it touched me to see how Wulfgar rushed up to him, "Oh! Frith, are you hurt, tell me?"

"No, Wulf, but what does that matter; *they* will hurt us more, remember we are the sons of a King."

They threw their arms round each other's necks and looked proudly, yet with tears in their young eyes, into their captors' faces; the disappointment was so great. But any one could see they came of kingly blood: alas! poor boys!

We were all led into the hall, the one general living room, I have no other name for it, of the farmhouse; and the Reeve, Beldeg, a man high in favour with Cædwalla, accosted us sternly.

I shall remember the scene till my dying day; he stood in the centre of the hall, by the hearth-stone; on either side were his men at arms, bearing spears with strong wooden shafts and cruel blades; one had a bow strung at his back, it was he who had brought down the horse. Tall and stout, clad in embroidered tunic, with cap of fur

and buskins of leather, was Beldeg, Reeve of Portnaceaster; and when the boys were confronted with him, he looked like a Goliath, who might slay them with a blow of his hand.

Behind the boys stood Hundwald, the bard, and I; and the fitful blaze of the torches held by the men illumined this rude judgment-hall: the door, I need not say, was strictly guarded, and the two great dogs, who had with difficulty been restrained from tearing the fallen fugitives, lay curled up within it, as if they, too, took an intelligent part in the proceedings.

The boys looked in the face of the Goliath of Gath without flinching.

"Who are ye, striplings, and why sought ye to fly?"

"The sons of a King," said the elder.

The Reeve was touched by their courage, as he never would have been by entreaties.

"Then ye are the prisoners of *my* King," he said, almost gently: "ye must come with me, promise me not to try to escape, and ye shall not be bound."

"Promise," said Hundwald, "alas! we cannot do more for you: it will be better so."

"We give you our word."

"And I trust you, brave but ill-fated boys. Let them be fed, they must go with me to Portnaceaster."

Then he turned to Hundwald.

"And who art thou?"

"The Thane of the Westmeonwaras."

"I understand it all; ye are Jutes like these islanders, and would fain help them to escape."

"Even so."

"I may not dismiss you: it is death to shelter the fugitives of the Wight. Who is this Priest?"

"Acca, our Mass-Priest."

"*He* may go: Cædwalla wars not with the Church. And thou, old man?"

"The bard of Atwald, and the guardian of his sons; like them, a fugitive from thy cruel King."

"Thou mayest share their captivity, and perchance their fate, an thou willest."

"Oh! Reeve," cried I, "tell us at once, how long wilt thou hold us in doubt? What is the will of thy King?"

Beldeg looked round, he saw that the boys had been led away, that food might be offered them, then he looked us sadly in the face.

"Cædwalla has sworn to spare none of the race of King Atwald; I am to put the lads to death. I grieve to slay such fine lads: but I must do my duty to my King."

"Oh! spare them," cried I.

"Thou knowest not what thou sayest; I may not."

"At least give me time to plead for their lives," said I, thinking of Wilfrid, now in the Wight.

"I may do that," he said. "I give thee three days, do thy best; if I hear not from thee ere the end of the third day, the boys will cease to live. Meanwhile the two men must await in captivity the will of Cædwalla."

"One more question; who told thee they were here?"

"One of thine own thralls, who has earned his freedom and a hide of land."

"I will scourge him to death," said Hundwald.

"He is out of thy power, we shall see to that."

"The curse of God light upon him."

"Doubtless it will, I praise him not."

Those were the last words I heard ere I was on my road to Reodford^g, where I had a friend, the Abbot Cynebert: he had great favour with the King, and to him I betook myself at once. Reodford was only a few miles from "*Ad Lapidem*."

They were singing Evensong as I drew near the Monastery. I heard the grand roll of the Psalmody, sung as our father, Gregory, taught men to sing; I entered the porch, and heard the chapter, the responsory, the hymn, the canticle, the collects and memories; oh! how that one, "*For Peace*," awoke an echo in my heart: for I thought of the poor orphans for whom I had to plead.

After Evensong I sought the Abbot. He gave me a gracious welcome, like a true man of God.

"I see there is somewhat amiss, my brother. I trust all is well amongst thy flock."

"All is well there, but"—and here I unfolded to him my mission, my grief for the poor boys, my longing desire that they should be spared and brought to the One True Fold, to find a father in the FATHER of the fatherless.

He heard me as so good a man would.

"It is hard for me to leave my duties, but works of mercy are, after all, the most acceptable to our Master. I will see Beldeg at once, and then sail with the early dawn for the island. Cædwalla is at Wihtgarasbyrg I believe."

^g. Redbridge.

"And Bishop Wilfrid is there; tell him all."

"I will, and doubt not, with his help, we shall prevail."

So, after a hasty refection, we set out together for Portnaceaster. The Abbot saw the Reeve, and obtained his promise that the lives of the poor boys should be spared until further orders had arrived from the King, the Abbot promising to sail on the morrow and see Cædwalla.

We found the King-lings were prisoners in the Castle, an old work of the men who had gone before us; they were in bed, we were told, and with the permission of the Reeve, we went to take a last look at them. The place of their confinement was a cell of stone belonging to the older part of the buildings.

They slept together upon a rude couch filled with straw, sleeping in each other's arms as peacefully as if in their own bed at home. We looked upon their faces, as beautiful as those which made our father, Gregory, say, "*Non angli sed angeli*," and longed to see the saving waters of Regeneration descend upon their fair heads and seal them the children of God, and inheritors of a better kingdom than that they had lost.

"Poor innocents," said the gaoler, who conducted us, "I hope they will not have to suffer for the sins of their father; but Cædwalla has sworn to extirpate the whole race of Atwald, as our Mass-Priest told us a King named Jehu did to the house of another King called Ahab, who was an idolator: so I suppose there is Scripture for it."

We only sighed.

On the morrow we rose early, and with the early dawn the Abbot left Portnaceaster in a small ship. Fain would I have gone with him, but he bade me stay with the boys. We watched the vessel till it had cleared the harbour, and entered the Solente, and then turning, I saw the lads standing on the adjacent mound, which protected the camp, gazing earnestly on the departing bark and the distant hills of their native Wight, lovely in the sweet effulgence of early morn.

I went to their side and saluted them.

"Where is that ship going, father?"

"To the home we have left," sighed the younger, "we can see thàt—ah! it is a home no longer to us."

"If I could tell you of a better home and a yet more loving Father."

"We want none, we are the sons of King Atwald."

"Will they slay us, father?" said the other.

"I trust not, my dear children: a good man, the Abbot Cynebert, has gone in that ship to beg your lives of the King: but I can teach you a secret which will make you content to live or die as God will."

"I am content to die now, quite content, and to go to Valhalla with my father," said Frithgar.

"So am I, Frith," said the other.

I could only sigh: heathenism was so strong within them, I could see it was not the time to press the Gospel upon them, so I talked with them on many subjects, only striving to gain their confidence.

And in a few hours we were great friends.

Youth soon shakes off sad impressions ; in the noontide of that day you would not have thought these boys had just lost their father, and were in danger of death : save that now and then in the midst of youthful glee they paused, sadness came over them, and sometimes tears filled their young eyes.

They were allowed the privilege of going about inside the camp, on their promise not to try to escape. Indeed I see not how they could have done so, ignorant of the country as they were. Hundwald was also a prisoner on like conditions in the camp, and we talked over our position very seriously.

"I know," he said, "that my own life is in danger. Cædwalla hates us Jutes, and would willingly slay me and take my lands to give to some favourite Saxon."^h

But my trust was in *Wilfrid*.

The wind was fair for coming or going ; and in the evening we all watched intently for the return of Cynebert the Abbot.

"I see the ship, she is coming out of the river, and entering the Solente," cried Frithgar, who had keen eyes. "Wulf, what is the message ? she bears life or death to us."

They clasped each other's hands.

"As well die as live amongst strangers, Frith ;

^h At this early period the tribal names of Angles, Saxons and Jutes, were not yet merged into the common name English, although Bede occasionally uses the latter term generally, and so distinguishes our ancestors from Britons or Welsh.

and then, if what the Priest tell us of life beyond be true, it may be better for us."

"Ah me, I should prefer Valhalla to the white robes and the palms and the singing, would not you, Wulf?"

"I think so, but if what he says is true, there is no Valhalla."

"Were not our fathers as likely to be right as he?"

The younger boy mused.

I could say nothing for the moment, when I overheard these words, as I stood near, prayer seemed the only remedy, and I prayed, as I never prayed before, that God would change their hearts, for well do I know that "Paul may plant, and Apollos water, but that God only can give the increase."

And He heard me.

The ship drew nearer, and we all recognised it, and knew the final decision was made, and that it was being borne to us by the winds. No one spoke, while we watched it coming in the path of the light which the sinking sun cast upon the waters, as we stood on the summit of the lofty citadel the old Romans had built; for we had all repaired thither, since it commanded a view of the waters between us and Wight.

The sun went down at last behind the long wooded promontory,ⁱ and a chilly feeling came over the air, as the vessel entered the harbour where erst of old, Port and his crew of Saxon pirates entered to slay the Welsh and seize the

ⁱ Whereon Osborne now stands.

land; up the wide harbour with the full tide, and at last to the Quay beneath the Castle.

I went down, the boys and Hundwald might not pass the gates.

The Abbot landed, his face was sad; he said nothing, but clasped my hand.

I saw, knew what he had to tell. At last I said, "DEATH?"

"Nay eternal LIFE if they will only have it."

I was silent and wept.

"Neither Wilfrid nor I could move him; he had sworn by his father's sword, and said he should never win another victory if he broke the oath, and then he asked the Bishop:

"'Is not heaven better than earth?'

"'It is.'

"'What happens after death to those who die newly baptized?'

"'They go to heaven.'

"'That solves the question. You shall convert and baptize them, and then my headsman shall strike off their heads with one stroke (I will strike off his if he needs more); they shall have their part in the kingdom you preach of, and I will have that which would have been theirs below, so it will be best for all:' and nothing more would he say, I think he was irritated by the pain of his wounds, so that not even Wilfrid could soothe him."

"Is he wounded seriously?"

"No, he will be about in a week; it has been hard fighting over there, and the place is full of fire and slaughter. Wilfrid has obtained a pre-

sent he values, for Cædwalla had made a vow, if he gained the victory, to give a fourth part of the land and of the booty to CHRIST: so he spared three hundred out of the twelve hundred families of the island, and has given them and their land to the Bishop, who proposes to send one of his Priests, Hiddila, who may administer the Word and Baptism of salvation to all who will be saved."

"And the rest of the folk?"

"There are none left, I fear."

"And the royal family?"

"All slain, save these two."

"How long does he give us for the work of salvation?"

"Only ten days."

"God grant that we may succeed."

"We shall: doubt it not; Wilfrid himself will come and see them."

And now the most grievous task had to be performed, to break the news gently to the poor doomed boys, who were sure to ask me the result of the Abbot's mission, when first they saw me.

For a while I would not face them; I was more of a coward than they were, for they sought *me*, and asked me the question.

"Father, is it life or death?"¹

I looked them sadly in the face, then turned my eyes away.

¹ The reader must remember, lest this seem unnatural, how far more familiar these young boys had been with death by violence, than in our happier days we are, and that a natural death was to our pagan ancestors the unnatural one, which they strove to avoid.

"We can see by your face," said Frithgar. "Well, so be it; a cow's death we shall not die; tell us when we are to sup with our father in Valhalla?"

"My dear sons, there is *no* Valhalla, it is heaven or hell, no one believes in Valhalla now who has learnt the truth. All England, save your little island, knows better."

"Frith, perhaps he is right," said the younger.

"Oh my children, save your souls," said I.

"But shall we ever see our father *there in their* heaven? he taught us that it was all Priest-craft: you know Wulf; he did."

"Don't, Frith, you make our good friend miserable; father, I will listen to you, if only because you are so good, and love us so well: tell me all about it?" said the younger.

I don't mind owning that my voice was choked with sobs, and I could not speak for a while; at last I began, and unfolded to the best of my power the story of the Cross, that sublime story which has conquered the hardest hearts, nay, melted hearts of stone.

At first they were only touched by the Divine pathos of the story, and in truth that is so awful that when one realizes it it overpowers one. Many a sleepless night have I had, when I could not withdraw my mind from the awful day of the Passion; and now it struck my catechumens as it did Clovis of old, so that they cried:

"Would that our father had been there, with his brave Wihtwaras, he would have avenged him."

"He needed no vengeance, He prayed even for His murderers, that they might be saved by the very Blood they shed."

"I never could have done that : if I feel pain from a blow, I long to strike back."

"But He died to save us, and when His cruel tormentors poured from His Sacred veins the ransom of the world, they only fulfilled His own Will ; He died for you, my *Frith*, for you, my *Wulf* ; that you might now pass through Death to Life."

I had their ears now, and made the best use my poor powers allowed of the opportunity.

The next few days were days of anxiety : would the good seed grow in such soil ? The elder seemed so hard, but the younger soon yielded, and it was only my weak faith which made me doubt so long ; when Wulfgar was really touched to the heart by Divine love, he became the best teacher of Frithgar. The Abbot, who visited us daily from Reodford, lent his aid, and on the tenth day came Wilfrid the Bishop.

We had hoped he might bring the news that the King had yielded to pity, but it was not so : there was no kingdom for them on earth : nor was there even place found. Wilfrid had promised that they should become Monks if spared, and so be out of Cædwalla's way ; but in vain, the King abode by his oath, and really *feared* to break it. But one good thing he did, he pardoned both Hundwald and the bard.

"I bring the mandate for *their* release," said Wilfrid.

The Bishop saw the boys that night (oh, how

gentle and kind he was, how winning his manner), and my heart thrilled with joy, when he said he was satisfied with them, and that he would himself baptize them on the morrow : that then they should hear Mass and receive their Viaticum.

"And then ?" said I.

"The executioner must dismiss their happy souls to God."

Why should one grieve, if one really believes all we profess ; yet again the tears rose unbidden to my eyes : the Bishop was more practical.

"Cheer up, my brother, would you not, if the choice were offered, be glad to go with them ? I should ; but we must wait His time ere our exile be over, and we see our Father-land."

In the morning, the eventful morning, I rose early, and saw the boys on the summit of the Tower, looking at their native land with their arms round each other's shoulders : I joined them.

"We are taking our last look at our old home," said Frithgar.

"Would you go back if you could ?"

"No," he said firmly, "not now."

My heart leapt for joy.

"Oh, my son," I said, "you make my old heart glad."

"Father ! you will hardly believe us, we both had the same dream last night."

"Tell it me."

"Methought I stood on a cliff and saw before me a deep dark river, Wulfgar was by my side. An angel clad in white stood by me : 'jump in the river, my child, and fear not,' he said, 'for

when thou passest through the waves He shall be with thee, and the floods shall not overflow thee.' We plunged in together, the water was cold and icy, but One seemed to hold us up. And on the opposite shore stood a Good Shepherd, tending His lambs: and we knew Him, and our hearts filled with joy. Oh the landing! He came to the brink and took our hands, and we ascended the shore to a land of everlasting flowers, where music sweeter than ever I've imagined was sounding, filling the air; and the glorious city rose therein, with gates of peals, full of brilliant light, towards which He led us; when we awoke, and found that each had dreamed the same dream."

"So," said Wulf, "we know where we are going this morning, after all is over. It is better far that so it should be. Good-bye, dear Wight, dear island home, and welcome brighter skies, and a happier land, where fire and sword can never enter."

That morning Wilfrid himself baptized them in the Church of Portnaceaster, clothed in their chrisoms, the white garments, "*the snow white robes of royal state*" of which holy Ambrose sang. Then the Mass was said, and they receive the Bread of Life into their hands, which trembled with emotion, as I saw, for I administered myself the heavenly Chalice of the New Dispensation.

They knelt till the Mass was over, and the ablutions taken, and we had taken off the holy garments; then they said:

"Lead on, for we are ready: we want to cross that river."

The Bishop Wilfrid, the Abbot Cynebert, and I, each embraced them, and we all then went together to the Castle Hall, wherein was a block with a red cloth thrown over it : and Beldeg stood by it with Hundwald.

"Let me bandage your eyes," said I.

"You need not, we never feared weapons."

It was the last touch of the old life.

"Wulf, you first," said Frith, fearing, I think, that his brother would be pained to see him suffer.

"No, you are the eldest, I shall follow directly."

"Better take the younger into the next room," said the Thane, Beldeg, "till his turn come."

"No," said Wulf, "I am not afraid to see it, only let it be at once. You know the Good Shepherd waits on the other side, do not keep Him long waiting. I wish we could both spring in the river together, but it will only be a moment, only you go first, Frith."

Frithgar yielded and knelt at the block.

Then the executioner entered noiselessly.

"*In manus Tuas commendo spiritum meum,*" said Wilfrid solemnly.

And the axe descended the first time.

Wulf could not help one little piteous cry after all he had said : but it was only a moment's weakness ; almost before they could remove the body he hastened to kneel where his brother had knelt, and his white chrisom was all bedewed with his brother's blood.

Again the Bishop repeated :

"*In manus Tuas commendo spiritum meum.*"

"Frith, I am coming."

And the axe descended the second time.

* * * * *

"God who loveth them has taken his children home wet with their baptismal dew, their lips radiant with the Precious Blood of the New Testament. Oh when shall our toil be over! oh when shall we rest with them!" said Wilfrid.

Then Hundwald and I returned to Westmeon, where I write this brief story. The bard, broken-hearted, is our guest, he is not a Christian yet, but I think he will soon become one.

Postscript written thirty years after.

I have just been reading the chronicle of my learned brother, Bede, Monk of Jarrow. I see that he calls my dear King-lings, "The first fruits of the Wight," who by believing secured their salvation, and were honoured by the particular grace of God.* "I never forget them at God's Altar wherever I may be."

* *Bede*, Book iv. Chapter xvi.





The Yellow Pest.

AN EPISODE OF A.D. 664.



T was the third day of May in the year of Grace 664. The scene was in the north country, at the Abbey of Lastingham, situated in a wild spot under the Pickering hills, where formerly haunts of robbers and lairs of wild beasts had rather abounded, than the habitations of men. But the holy Cedd, Bishop of the East Saxons, had selected this spot for a Monastery, and had begged the sight from King Ethelwald, son of S. Oswald ; for he could not dwell in the south, without occasional visits to his own country, to preach to his kinsfolk, and breathe his native air. There he had first hallowed the ground, and afterwards passed part of a Lent there, fasting on all week-days till evening, when he took but an egg, a morsel of bread, and a little milk and water. There he founded a brotherhood after the Celtic type, for he was of the followers of holy Columba, and he built a Church of wood.

And now nearly ten years had passed away, and great changes had taken place. The Council at Hilda's Monastery, near Whitby,^a had been held, where it had been decided that the customs and traditions of the Scotie Church should be abandoned for those of the mother and mistress of Churches across the sea. The old Scotie Church passed away, so far as its peculiarities were concerned; it had brought the faith to men's hearts by the religion of love and self-sacrifice, but it was perhaps enfeebled by a certain insular narrowness, and by the lack of appreciation of beauty and dignity in worship to become the Mother Church of England with its world-wide associations.

But the decision of the Council had caused much grief at Lastingham, and their Abbot and founder, Bishop Cedd, had promised to visit them, to justify his submission to the Latin usages, and to comfort their hearts.

It was the tenth hour, as we should say four in the afternoon, of the third of May in the year 664. The sun had shone brightly all the day, until the brethren had left the Church after Nones, when all observed a strange diminution of light.

"What is the matter with the sun?" said one.

"And seest thou not how the cattle are coming home, as if it were night?" replied another.

And the strange hush over the land.

The brethren gathered on the open sward in front of the Abbey, and looked down upon the pasture-land and fields which they had reclaimed

^a *Monasterium quod dicitur Strenæshalch.*—BEDE.

from the forest,—a deep mysterious twilight seemed falling upon them.

“Surely it is only the tenth hour?”

They could now bear to look upon the orb of day reduced to the dimensions of the new moon: a thin circle of light around an opaque body.

“It is an eclipse.”

“A token of God’s wrath for Whitby.”

A general deep murmur accepted this interpretation of the prodigy.

“We have abandoned the right way of keeping Easter, and the LORD is displeased.”

“We have accepted the false tonsure, and the LORD does not know our altered heads.”

“We have made changes in our Liturgy, without due authority, to please the proud Romans.”

“Brethren,” said the Prior, “let us beseech God to turn away His wrath from us. Come into the Church, and let us say the penitential Psalms.”

And the whole brotherhood were soon on their knees.

In those days of ignorance, an eclipse was always taken as a token of God’s displeasure; men can only judge according to their lights.

Our second scene opens in the midst of a thick wood, clothing one of the many hills around the Monastery at Lastingham, and the time an evening, a few weeks after the eclipse. Beneath was a deep glen, above which a mountain-torrent

babbled. It could not be seen, but its voice alone broke the solemn silence of the wood.

A well-trodden path penetrated beneath the shade of spreading oaks and stately elms, the twilight—

“Was like the truce of God,
With earthly pain and woe;”

“the woods were God’s first Temples,” says the poet; their graceful outlines suggested to men the stately columns and lofty arches of His Cathedrals, and many a time did the brethren of Lastingham pace its recesses. Sometimes in meditation on “The things of God:” sometimes to go on errands of mercy.

For these early brethren sought their LORD especially amongst the suffering members of His Mystical Body, and found Him in the sadness of mortal anguish. In the thirst of the fevered patient they recognized His Cry on the Cross; and they gave even a cup of cold water, as to Him in His poor.

Two brethren were passing through the wood, and we will listen to their conversation.

“It is too true, the warning eclipse spake not in vain, Tuda is dead.”

“A holy man, yet one who should not have suffered himself to be intruded into the See of another.”

“Remember, the See was vacant.”

“Because Coleman could not brook the change—and now this visitation proves he was right.”

“It tries the faith of the converts in the low country, where our father Cedd is Bishop. The

sudden affliction has had the effect of throwing many back to the old false worship. And Prince Sieghere, nephew of the King of Essex, has begun to restore the pagan temples, and to offer sacrifice to devils."

"The dog then has returned to his vomit again; did they think that the Cross of CHRIST promised immunity from earthly sufferings?"

"Others have recourse to amulets and charms, as if they could drive away the Yellow Pest, the sickness which destroyeth at noon-day."

"Why do men call it the Yellow Pest?"

"From the ghastly hue of its dead victims."

"And is it true that Erconbert, King of Kent, and Deusdedit, Archbishop of Canterbury, are both dead of it?"

"It is, and it seems to be spreading northward: we must be prepared to share in the scourge."

"There is but one way of avoiding it."

"And that?"

"To restore our ancient rites, and confess with tears of penitence how we yielded to cunning craftiness, with which the Latins, and their Wilfrid, lay in wait to deceive."

"Even so, my judgment is as yours."

At this moment they were passing an opening in the woods, from which a wide view of the valley beneath was to be obtained. A pillar or wreath of watery mist was floating slowly half way down the opposite hillside, gracefully visible against the green foliage which clothed the hill.

"How singular the form of that mist!"

"I like it not, my brother, it is said that the

plague travels under such form : God shield us from it."

And they sang together :

"*From plague, pestilence and famine, deliver us, O Lord.*"

Now the Monastery came into view, and they entered its portals as the setting sun told that the hour of Compline approached, and they entered their rude wooden Church, which Cedd had built.

The Service was the germ from which the later office was developed, containing the same Psalms, the hymn of S. Ambrose, but not the *Nunc Dimittis*, which formed no part of the early monastic use.

When the office was over, the Prior Kynebil, who ruled the Monastery in the absence of his brother, Bishop Cedd, who was still Abbott, addressed the community from the words, "Whom the LORD loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." He pointed out that the members of a Thorn-crowned Head must not expect to escape their share of suffering, and that such suffering was often sacramental in its character, an outward sign of an inward grace bestowed thereby ; much he said concerning the changed nature of suffering, sanctified by the participation in human woe of the Incarnate SON of God : and said, that as the rose when pressed gives forth its sweetest scents, so do the saints of God under affliction the more display their manifold graces.

Then he came to the point :

It has been said that this affliction hath befallen us, because we have accepted the decrees of Whitby, and changed our customs; but we may not rashly interpret the visitation of God, nor may we make any further alteration in the will, now established by the authorities which God has placed over us. Our father Cedd, who was present at Whitby, will shortly be here; he will come as the messenger and ambassador from God, we will hear patiently and be guided by his wisdom.

“And now let no man’s heart fail him because of the pestilence; it cannot come hither without the permission of our heavenly FATHER, and if it does, I trust that we have already learned that death is to the faithful the gate of life eternal. Come then life, come then death, all things are CHRIST’S, and CHRIST is GOD.”

On the morrow, the Brother Hildebert wandered out of his Convent into the wood, amongst the hoary, ivy-clad trees, the mistletoes pendent from the oaks, and the fallen trunks of former monarchs of the forest: much he pondered, as he walked, on the mysteries of time and eternity: and to his mind the great question again presented itself which has perplexed philosophers in all ages.

Is life worth living?

Nature was very beautiful that day—the sky of the fairest blue, the shade of the forest delicious, the ground carpeted with flowers, the songs of the

birds of the air were most sweet ; but suddenly a sharp hiss, and a snake glided across the path, and paused, raising its crest in a threatening attitude.

The Brother avoided it, and passed onward ; but as he did so, the little incident seemed like an allegory : much beauty in the world, but the serpent beneath the flower. Only could life be said to be worth living, if it were the preparation for a land where neither sin nor sorrow can enter.

A startling interruption broke the current of his meditations : a hasty step, and a boy, wild with haste, rushed upon the scene.

" Art thou a man of God ? Come to my father, he is dying hard by."

Hildebert followed the boy at once, who led the way to a road which traversed the glen, and there, by the wayside, lay a dying man, unconscious in all the delirium of fever, and every now and then uttering a cry, " Water ! water ! I thirst !"

" So did He upon the Cross," thought the Brother ; " and so does He yet in the members of His mystical Body," then he said :

" Have you no water to give him ?"

The boy pointed to an empty vessel.

Hildebert took it, and ran to a spring which he knew to be not far off ; he returned, and applied it to the parched lips.

" How long has he been ill, my child ? Whence come ye ?"

" From the Marchland ; we fled from the Yellow Pest, which had slain our neighbours, and lo ! it

has overtaken us: my mother died of it, father and I are alone, no kith or kin."

"Call upon GOD, He alone can save: leave your poor father to me, or you will die too."

"I care not; I love him; if he dies, let me die."

"We must wait GOD's call, all of us."

And then he observed consciousness return to the sufferer.

"Who art thou?" asked the sick man.

"A poor servant of CHRIST."

"A messenger from heaven, tell me of Him. *I thirst.*"

"So did He for thy soul."

"Did He know of me?"

"Yes, before even thou wert in thy mother's womb. His Love embraced thee when He hung on the Cross."

"And yet I suffer."

"So did He, but suffering is the path to glory."

"But I have been a great sinner."

"*He came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. Repent, confess, thou shalt be loosed from all.*"

And so the old story of redeeming love sanctified yet one more death scene, lighted it up as a beam of light through a rift in the clouds on a stormy and dark day gladdens and brightens the cold grey earth.

The end came at eventide, and then Hildebert, after the commendatory prayer, said to the weeping boy:

"Now it is well with him; but for thee?"

"Oh, take me with thee."

But would it not be bringing the infection into the Community, thought the Brother; still the poor lad could not be left, and Hildebert said:

"Follow me, my son, we will take care of thee."

But ere they departed he cast one look back at the corpse; it was plain why they called the disease the Yellow Pest; already the face was assuming a ghastly saffron hue. The Brother turned back and covered it. Then he said:

"We will see that he has Christian burial; weep not, my child, it is only the empty casket; the tenant has escaped the miseries of this naughty world, and, like the butterfly soaring in the sun, has left the grub behind."

And he led the weeping boy back to the Monastery; he did not, however, take him within the precincts, but left him awhile in a hut without the gates, while he consulted the Prior, Kynebil, brother of Cedd, how to avoid needless risk.

It was decided that the boy should be cared for outside, and if he remained unaffected by the disease, should be admitted amongst the other orphans, whom they nurtured at Lastingham, as an inmate of the Monastery. Brother Hildebert gladly took charge of him.

But the next day the poor boy sickened, and ere two days were over, slept by his father's side in the graveyard of the Monastery.

And now grave apprehension of the conse-

quences spread over the community; but they committed it all in prayer to God, and patiently awaited His Will.

A few weeks after the occurrence just related, in the early part of October, a small party of men was descending the path on the woody hill opposite the Monastery, which at length they discerned through the opening blade.

"There stands Lavingham, a temple of God's grace, said the leader of the party, a venerable man in Episcopal garb. It was, indeed, none other than Cedd, Bishop of the East Saxons, and founder of Lavingham.

His attendants were one or two brethren, and some lay attendants.

"Behold, they see us; a party issues forth, let us hasten to salute the brethren with a holy kiss," says the good Bishop, his face lighting up with joy.

But as they drew nearer, there was a sad and downcast air observable in the party from the Convent, which painfully impressed the newcomers with a sense that somewhat was amiss. One alone came forward to greet the Bishop, as he drew near, the others lingered.

"God be with you," said Cedd, as the Brother knelt to receive his blessing; "how fare ye all, is it well with you?"

"Alas! the Hand of God hath been heavy upon us since we last met."

"My brother, your Prior, why is he not here?"

"He lives."

"Is he then ill?"

"The Yellow Pest is amongst us."^b

"Alas, I knew it not; I come from the south, where it hath indeed been heavy upon man and beast, but that it had reached this lonely spot surprises as it grieves me; how came it to pass?"

"One who fled from the plague died in our woods, Brother Hilbebert tended him in his last moments, he caught the infection and died also."

"Then hath he won the Martyr's Crown, for Martyrs we hold them who thus give their lives for the brethren: blessed was he in his death."

"And since then many of the brethren have died, we have scarcely strength to carry on the appointed services: and to nurse the sick. Come not to us, my father; the Church needs thy services, they who tend the sick generally take the disease and die too, as Brother Hildebert did."

"And what of that, they win their crown early and surely: yet we may not rashly throw away the life God has given until He calls; let us seek counsel of Him who is perfect Wisdom and Love."

They knelt on the sward in silence.

Then the Bishop arose.

^b This awful pest slew two-thirds of the inhabitants of Ireland and a vast number in Britain: three Kings; three Bishops, Deusdedit, Cedd, and Tuda; Boisil, Abbot of Melrose; Ethelburga, Abbess of Barking, were amongst its victims, only one in thirty infected recovered.

"Brethren, God has revealed His Will in prayer. I go unto my brethren, and if it be as I think, His Will, I shall die in the House of Prayer I have loved, ministering to them to the last: but ye must return and carry my last words to my people afar off."

"Nay, we would fain die with thee."

"Ye are not called upon so to do; stay ye here awhile, sit on the mossy banks, and I will commit what I have to say to your memory; then depart in peace."

He spake like one whom God inspired, and they made no further attempt to alter his decision, and for a while they conversed together. The Bishop gave them many messages, and various directions concerning his distant See, and then he said:

"I know that ye amongst whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more; wherefore let us part as the blessed Paul parted with them of Ephesus at Miletus."

And as they did of old on the sands of Miletus, so now did these holy men; they knelt down and the Bishop prayed aloud, and they in like manner wept sore, sorrowing most for the words he spake, that they should see his face no more.

Then the brethren who had accompanied Cedd returned, and he went back with the others into the plague-stricken Monastery, and soon he was with his brother Kynebil.

The Prior died that night in his brother's presence, attended by holy psalms and fervent prayers to the last.

On the morrow the Bishop and Abbot addressed his flock on the subject which had vexed their souls, he recapitulated the arguments which had conquered at Whitby, and justified the decision which had been arrived at there; the points in question were not of primary importance. The preservation of unity was essential: why should they contend for such usages as prevented full communion with the Church throughout the world, especially on the matter of Easter, wherein the difference had caused sore dissensions at court, for while the King, Oswy, fasting laid aside, was rejoicing in the joy of Easter, the Queen, Eanfled, with her attendants, was observing the solemnities of Palm Sunday.

With true Catholicity of spirit he argued that all which could hinder Godly union and concord between brethren should be laid aside, and that Easter blessings did not after all depend upon accurate Paschal computation, but upon the keeping it not with the old leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

These were his last words on the subject; much he said upon the joy which should follow the patient endurance of suffering, and that this light affliction of the Yellow Pest would work for them a far greater weight of glory.

And a few days later Cedd fell sick also.

He knew it was for his end. "It is the LORD," said he, "let Him do what seemeth Him best."

His third brother, Chad, had arrived at the Monastery and was with him.

“My brother,” he said, “I know that I go the way of all flesh, and that the time of my departure is at hand: but it is revealed to me that thou shalt remain awhile, and to thee as Abbot I commit these poor sheep. After awhile thou mayest be called to higher ministries, until the time when thou shalt receive the reward of a good and faithful servant, when I will myself come to welcome and fetch thee to the joy of the Lord, if so it be permitted by Him.”

“And now spread ashes on the ground, trace upon them the Holy Cross, and lay me thereon, and call the brethren to speed my departure with holy psalms and prayers.”

And they did so.

And while they prayed they heard a burst of heavenly music, which thrilled into their very hearts; it seemed to come through the open lattice from the azure void above, and when they looked they saw the dying Saint stretch forth his hands as in rapture, then fall back in death.

They buried him in the open grave-yard, where the dews of heaven might fall upon his grave; but many years after a stately Church was raised at Lastingham, and the precious relics transferred therein.

Now when his brethren who lived in the Monastery he had founded amongst the East Saxons, heard that their Bishop was dead and buried in the kingdom of Northumbria, thirty of the brethren travelled to Lastingham, desiring, as they said, either to live near the place where their father lay, or if God should so please, to die and

be buried near him; right willingly were they received by the northern brotherhood to fill the places of those whom death had taken away: but there, according to God's Will, they all died of the pestilence, except one boy, preserved to render high service to the Church in days to come,^c and so they reposed by their father's side.

And Chad became Abbot of Lavingham and in later years was appointed Bishop of Lichfield; and when at last his course was run, we are told that a holy man saw in a vision the soul of S. Cedd his brother with an attendant troop of angels descend from heaven, and receiving the soul of S. Chad return to the celestial kingdom. But this belongs rather to the story of S. Chad, and we will add no more here.^d

NOTE.—There were four brothers, Cedd, Kynibil, Celin and Chad, who all rose to eminence in the Church: two, as we have seen, became Bishops; one of the East Saxons, one of Lichfield.

^c *Bede*, Book iii. Chapter 23. ^d *Bede*, Book iv. Chapter 3.

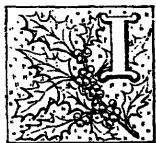




The Autobiography of Kyneswith.

A STORY OF THE MISSION OF S. BIRINUS.

A.D. 635.



I, KYNESWITH, an unworthy handmaid of the LORD, serving Him in the estate of holy Virginity, in the house of S. Mary of Bethany at Dorcic : am minded, ere I put off this earthly tabernacle, as the LORD my heavenly Bridegroom hath shewn me I must shortly do, to leave behind me some record of the way in which the LORD hath dealt with this people and me His poor handmaid, in these latter days ; may His holy Name be praised.

My father was Waermund, Thane of Blidberia, under the Downs of Bearroc ;^a he owned many hides of land and had a great company of ceorls and theowes, who did him service, and tilled the land ; he was of the race of Woden, as he boasted, and was a mighty hunter before the LORD, ere the

^a Blidberia, Blewbury. Bearroc, whence later Berkshire.

blessed Evangel came amongst us, to lighten us, who sat in darkness and the shadow of death.

My mother was Ermentrude, daughter of a neighbouring Thane, and their union was blessed with but three children, my brother Sexmund, my sister Ermenred, and my unworthy self, the youngest of the three.

We lived in plenty, the land brought forth her increase, for God, although we knew Him not in those days, was not unmindful of us, but gave us fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with joy and gladness. The deer were numerous in the woods, the meadows were full of sheep, and as the Psalmist says, "the valleys stood so thick with corn, that they did laugh and sing."

But all these earthly goods were of small avail in the hour of tribulation. They could not satisfy the soul, and God by His goodness gave my heart no rest, until it found rest in Him.

I was born in the year of Redemption six hundred and twenty, my earliest remembrances are of our moated grange, our rude dwellings, built of wood on stone foundations, and thatched with reeds from the fen: there in the great hall sat my mother and her maidens spinning, around the great fire in the centre: I stood by her side, while they wove clothes for the men, and watched the smoke curling upwards and eddying through the great opening in the roof, while my father and brother hunted in the woods and slew the wolf, and the wild boar, or the hart and the roe, sometimes fighting with hostile neighbours, for we had

bloody feuds in those days, and one deed of violence begat another.

Then in the winter nights, a wandering harper or gleeman would come, and sing songs of the grand men of old, and their deeds in combat, while the men mended their weapons, or drank mead around the fire after their day's toil. Thus I heard of the great wars in which our people had slain the Welsh or taken their land, of the conquest of the country in which I lived, when the mighty Cuthwulf came up the Thames, and gave the Welsh and their towns to fire and sword, burning Dorcic, and taking the four towns^b fifty years before I was born.

But these tales interested my brother Sexmund more than they did me. I used to see his eyes flash, his colour heighten, and his hand grasp his little sword as he listened to the old songs, and sometimes he would tell me that he grieved that there were no more Welsh left to conquer; and that he would he had lived in those days.

"How would you like people to invade us, and slay us, or drive us away in turn?"

"I only wish they would try; but I shall never have the chance of doing glorious deeds, like my grandfather, who fought at Cuthwulf's side, when he drove the Welsh like sheep over the river at Wealingaford and took the land.

But somehow I pitied the poor Welsh, and their

^b She must mean Benson, Eynsham, Aylesbury, Lenbury, which were taken by the Saxons in 571.

wives and children, and couldn't help fearing that the day might come when the fates might avenge them, for God had given me a gentler mind than either my brother or even my elder sister, who married a great warrior amongst the Angles.

I was always a dreamy, meditative child, fond of lonely walks. I know not how it was, but there was a great longing in my heart for something, I know not what.

One day a harper came to our house from the north, and told us the story well known now, of the conversion of Edwin of Northumbria, and the words of Coifi when the Wise men sat in deliberation about the new teaching—thus he sang :

“And what man's life is like I fain would tell—
 'Tis like as when, in some wild winter's night,
 A little bird seeks shelter from the storm
 Attracted by the cheerful heat and glow,
 Where men sat round the fire, within the hall.
 He enters by a door perchance ajar,
 And for one moment nestles in the warmth,
 Then fearing harm and wrong from hostile hand
 Again into the darkness wings his way,
 And in the storm again is lost to sight :
 Such is our life, it has from darkness sprung,
 And into darkness wends it way again :
 But whence it came, and whither goeth it
 No man can tell.
 And if this Priest knows aught about the thing
 Let him be heard.”

And then he told us how Coifi set the example by calling for arms and a horse, and riding against his own sanctuary at Godmanham.

But my father interrupted the bard sternly :

"No more of that man : had I Coifi here, with this axe I fain would split his head. Shall we forsake Thor and Woden, who led our fathers to victory, and exchange our hope of the joy and stir of Valhalla, for the Welshman's heaven?"

"It is a religion fit only for slaves," said my brother Sexmund; "their gods did not protect the Welsh against our grandsires."

"Sing of *our* gods, leave the white CHRIST alone; and as for Edwin, did he not come into Wessex as the destroyer but a few years ago, and slay five æthelings of the blood of Cerdic in battle; my own cousin fell in that war."

"But that was because Prince Cwicheim sent Eomer with his poisoned dagger," said the bard.

"And I wish Eomer had struck straighter," said Sexmund.

"Old man thou art touching upon dangerous ground, there is blood feud between us and the Angles : sing of other matters."

And the bard nought offended, sang such a touching song, about Balder the beautiful,^c the brightest and best of all the gods; how he perished beneath the assaults of the powers of evil, slain by the giant Loki and the dog-fiend Fenris, and how even Thor could not save him, and all Valhalla mourned.

^c This story of Balder, as found in the ancient runes, reminds one of the famous passages concerning "the golden age" in the Eclogues of Virgil. It was a revelation of the doctrine of the Passion and Resurrection under a fable.

"But yet men say that he shall rise again
 And burst the bonds of death which him enfold :
 And then shall come the reign of blessed peace,
 And earth bring forth her myriad myriad flowers
 To welcome his appearing :
 Then shall men turn their spears to pruning hooks :
 And make their swords give place unto the plough :
 And birds shall sing their songs in sweeter strains :
 And suns shall rise more glorious than before :
 And rippling waters run in richer glow
 And fill with melody the boundless woods :
 And love shall rule where erst fierce discord reigned :
 And earth resound with harmonies of Peace :
 No more shall tears flow down the orphan's cheeks,
 For Balder then shall wipe those tears away,
 And render unto men their lost again."

Even now, after the lapse of all these years, I
 see the astonished gaze of my father and brother,
 the keen interest on the face of my mother, who
 thought of those she had lost in ruthless war ; for
 there was not a household amongst us where the
 war-fiend had not claimed its tithe, and we women
 loved the thought of *Peace*.

When the bard ceased there was dead silence
 for awhile, the smoke eddied through the orifice
 above. I saw a tear steal down my mother's
 face.

At last Sexmund spoke.

"Is not that a Christian song ?"

"Nay, it comes from your own runes."

"But it is like the songs the Christian Priests
 sing."

"Bard, art thou thyself a Christian ?" said my
 father.

"I am."

“Hospitality is the law of the gods, but, bard, leave this place to-morrow: if thou come again we will set our ban-dogs upon thee. Now rest in peace, for thou hast eaten of my bread.”

The bard had gone, but the story of “Balder the beautiful” clung to me; it had been told me before, but never had it sunk so deeply on my mind.”

And I wandered next day into the woods all alone, pondering much upon the strains of the bard, and longing to hear more about the CHRIST; I loathed the fierce cruel creed of the Northmen; Valhalla, with its hideous feasts by night, and fighting by day, was an abomination to me. Whence did all this come, but by Divine grace? God had revealed His Son to my heart, yet I knew Him not by the hearing of the ear. I only knew that my heart was in unrest, nor did it ever afterwards *find* peace until it found it in Him who loved me and gave Himself for me.

How wondrous are the ways of Grace! now in one way, now another, it comes into the hearts of men, now through the words of a saintly missionary, now through the ordinary course of the ministrations of the Church the Spouse: but sometimes, as it did to me, through a direct revelation: the heart was pleading for light, but *He* put that pleading there, and the light came in answer.

There was a pond in the woods, of deepest clearest water, fed by brooks, rich with watercress, and pure as our brooks which spring from the downs here; but this pond was remarkable for the way in which it reflected the face and person of those who gazed upon it, and many who were vain of their beauty came to look at themselves. The trees, the flowers, all were seen on its surface, and the blue vault of heaven shone as brightly on the silent water as up above.

And there, led not by chance on this day, I came and sat down on the bank and gazed upon the stream. It was a lovely day, and all was so beautiful: ah, but I wanted more than His works to make me happy, I wanted *Him*.

Did Balder live in CHRIST? was the story in the runes only an allegory of the *Truth* of the story of CHRIST? I saw afterwards that that was what the bard from Northumbria meant.

And so it was, that while I gazed, a wondrous thing took place, it will never leave my memory while this heart beats. On the surface of the water appeared figures and forms, which were not reflected from above—struggling confused until they settled into fixity.

And then in that water was pictured the form of the Cross and the Crucified, and the face was instinct with dying Love, and He gazed upon me, and as He did so that gaze enthralled me: but it was only for a moment: and He was gone.

Was it a dream—or a waking vision? In either case it was equally real to me, and I rested not

until He gave to me to bear about in the body the dying of the LORD, until His life should also be manifested in me.

I returned home; my mother with a mother's fondness asked what ailed me, but I could not tell her then.

But I had gained a new power, I could pray that CHRIST, if He were indeed God, would lead me into the knowledge of the Truth, and bring me into His Church. I knew enough for that, and it was all I knew. It must be remembered that vague and distorted accounts of CHRIST and Christians were slowly penetrating England: Kent and Northumbria were already wholly or partially converted, and in the intercourse of nation with kindred nation, it was impossible but some knowledge should be diffused concerning the main facts and doctrines of the Gospel.

So I had heard of the Crucifixion by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye had seen it, whether in a trance, or dream, or through a miracle, I know not: nor does it greatly matter.

I longed to meet the bard again, whom I now suppose to have been a travelling missionary, but he appeared no more for a long time.

It was only a few days after this that one of those events occurred which so often broke in upon the monotony of our home life: not unpleasantly to my brother, but which, nevertheless, were naturally the cause of great anxiety, and

even distress, to my poor mother and to me; I mean hostile raids upon our territory on the part of troublesome neighbours.

Not many miles from us lived the *Uffingas*, under the hill of the "*White Horse*," so called from the figure of that animal cut in the turf down to the chalk, commemorating the conquest of that district by the chief of that tribe, Uffa.

The grandson of that original Uffa, still bearing the same name, now lived and ruled in the vale, which his grandsire had colonized after the great struggle which took place fifty years before my birth.

My father and this Uffa had an old feud, and from time to time had ravaged each other's lands, contrary to the King's peace; but although Cyne-gils dwelt only six miles away at Dorcic, he was seldom appealed to as arbitrator, nor did he force his mediation upon us, he rather let men fight it out after the "good old fashion."

The work of the day was over, it was harvest time, and the scanty crops were nearly gathered in, and stored away in barns ere the winter storms. The moon, the harvest moon, rose that night bright and full, the night was clear as the day.

Supper was served in the hall, Thane, ceorls and theowes all feasted together, the board was laden with large joints of beef and mutton and venison, and bowls of *furmenty*, or new corn boiled in milk. Mead and ale were there in huge tankards, and the men were satisfying their appetites to the full, and casting the bones to the big dogs who lay stretched on the rushes which covered the

floor, and all went merrily like unto the joy of men who feast in harvest,—when suddenly—

A ceorl rushed in with his head bleeding from the stroke of some weapon ; we knew him, it was one of the labourers from our distant fields to the west, where they had a separate dwelling amongst the woods.

“My lord,” he cried, “the Uffingas are out, and are carrying away the corn and cattle, hasten or we shall lose it all.”

No one tarried to hear further, they all rose as one man, dogs and all, and turned out to seek their weapons, for were not those the happy days of which the heathen still boast, when men might take who had the power, and men might keep if they could.

Sexmund my brother was delighted, eager to distinguish himself in the fray ; he called me to help him don sword and spear, and to fill his quiver with arrows, and eke to gird him with a light breastplate, and put his plated cap on his head, all the armour he would tarry for, when the churls and theowes went only in leather jerkins. So he went while I cried :

“Come back safe, dear brother, thy mother’s heart would be sore without thee.”

“I must take my chance like the rest,” he said gaily, “I will bring home the head of a Uffinga. or they shall get mine.”

“Fire ! fire ! fire !”

We *rushed* out of the hall to see our barns burning in the distance, three miles away : then

off *rushed* Thane, ceorl, thrall, dogs, and all, on doubtful deeds intent.

But before CHRIST taught us better things, such events were the ordinary incidents of our lives: now we stand fast in the liberty wherewith He hath made us free.

We could not rest indoors, so all we women, wives and daughters of Thane, ceorls, and thralls, went to a little knoll not far from the house, and watched in deep anxiety: we saw one more fire arise, and then came, born on the night-wind, the shouts of those who strive for the mastery, distinct even at that distance, for the wind blew from the west.

It was a long time of weary waiting there before our anxiety was relieved. At last a thrall came galloping from the scene of strife, with the joyful news that we were victorious, and that the Uffingas were in full flight, leaving their booty behind them, and that our folk were in hot pursuit.

"Have any of our folk fallen?" said the mother trying to command her voice, and seem firm.

"Of course we have lost a few, but we have slain a great many more. The Uffingas are not women, and men must take their chance; but they have paid for their insolence with the blood of their bravest, and their chief Uffa has fallen by the hand of our Thane, in single combat."

Then went up a shout of joy, pride and the lust of warlike glory, overpowering the thought of our own slain. Yet I felt even then how deadly the

feud had become, and now I know that but for the lesson of forgiveness which CHRIST hath taught us, grandsons would yet be slaying each other for the sins of their grandsires.

"We may now return home," said the mother, "and snatch a little rest ere they return with the dawn."

So we went indoors, and tried to sleep, but it was only a make-believe. I was longing to clasp my father and brother safe and sound to my heart.

Towards the morning I heard a loud blast of horns in the distance, and knew that they were returning. I was up, and out of doors directly; we had laid down half dressed, and I had only thrown on an upper garment; all the rest were soon after me, and as we gained the knoll, we saw our folk returning, shouting for victory.

We rushed to meet them, mother was soon in father's arms, but where was Sexmund?

"I am afraid the boy is hurt, he was struck in the thigh with a spear, and they are carrying him behind; but I do not think it is a deadly wound, and hope he will soon be about again; he had behaved like a hero, and slain his first foe, before he got this wound in his second encounter."

I hurried to the rear, and there I saw them bringing him along on a litter formed of intertwined boughs.

"Oh, my Sexmund, are you hurt badly?"

The boy looked in my face with a mingled expression of pride and pain:

"No, sister, there is not much the matter, and

I had killed an Uffinga, as I said I would, before I got hurt, and I think my arrows tickled a few more, although they got away: and they have got the man who wounded me, safe prisoner, and are bringing him behind, so that if I die, he may be slain with my horse and dog at my grave, and serve me in Valhalla."

"But you will not die?"

"I daresay he hopes as much now, that hound of an Uffigna: he knows that his life depends on mine."

Then one of the bearers stepped unawares into a rut, and I saw a spasm of pain in my poor brother's handsome face.

We bore him home, and put him on his bed, where the Leech,^d with such skill as leeches had then, dressed his wounds: it was a spear thrust, which had just missed the main artery, or there would have been an end of our poor Sexmund then and there.

But we dared not tell him then, that the Leech declared that the sinews were injured, and that he would never be able to walk without a limp again; poor youth, he would as soon received a mortal wound, and ended it all then and there, as have lived, as he would have said, to be a useless man, and to die a cow's death after all.

Day after day he lay on his couch, cheered with the hope of recovery; but as the slow weeks passed away, and hope seemed ever to grow weaker, he began to fear the worst, which none yet dared tell him.

^d Physician.

Meanwhile the young Uffinga, who had given him the wound, was kept in close ward; he was not otherwise ill-treated, and was even offered liberty about the place, on condition that he would not run away; but this he refused, saying, he would not throw away his chance of escape or rescue.

Many weeks had passed away since the raid of the Uffingas, my brother Sexmund still lay on his couch, the wound it is true had superficially healed, but some sinews had been injured, and he could not walk without pain. He tried to bear his lot—for to him it was indeed a hard lot—bravely, but we could see from time to time how grievous the affliction was to one like him, whose whole life had been motion hitherto.

The young Uffinga was still a prisoner, his friends had offered heavy ransom for him, but it had been steadfastly refused, and his kinsfolk were told that his life depended on the recovery of Sexmund. We always lived in expectation of another warlike attack from his friends, having for its object the release of the captive; and our men-folk lived with harness on shoulders, and arms at hand, but it never came: perhaps they were too much weakened by their recent losses in the foray.

I watched often by the bedside of my poor brother, and memory recalls many a conversation, wherein his ideas derived from his bringing up,

or hereditary in the child of primitive warriors, came into sharp contrast with those which I was learning from the CHRIST.

"How is that dog of an Uffinga getting on?" said he one evening.

I recall the boy as I write, the boyish form, half hidden by the coverlet of wolfskins, save the pale face, and the large lustrous eyes.

"He suffers for want of exercise, even as you do, being a prisoner."

"But he has no wound to trouble him, with gnawing pain as if something were biting there, yet I would not wish him to suffer as I do, Uffinga though he is; I got the wound in fair fight."

I was glad to hear him say even this, and asked:

"Would you like them to set him free, and to take ransom for him?"

"No, for he must be my slave in Valhalla, he must die and be buried with horse and hound and serve me in the other world; no, they must not let him go."

"Alas, my dear brother, all the world is getting to disbelieve in this fabled Valhalla, where all the strife and bloodshed of earth is but, as they say, to be continued."

"I have had too little war here; I longed to be a warrior, and see what has come of it."

"Better far the Christian's heaven of peace and love."

"It would be better doubtless for women and girls, and you will get there I trust, as you desire,

my sister ; and if there be a pathway between Valhalla and heaven I may come and see you sometimes."

Such were his darkened conceptions, but I could not let him rest in them. I felt that this view of a Valhalla co-existent with heaven could not be true.

"But if there be a Christian's heaven there can be no Valhalla."

"And I will take my chance with my forbears, and where they have gone, there will I go, what is good enough for them is good enough for me."

Then he turned his face to the wall and said no more.

But the poor boy got worse and worse, and I saw, with sorrow, that there was no chance of his recovery ; an old man skilled in surgery, said the bone was affected, and that the limb ought to be taken off, but Sexmund would not hear of it, and said that he would sooner die : and that he would rather go to the grave having his two legs, than limp into Valhalla upon one ; and father did not urge him against his will.

"It is hard," he said ; "I have only one son, and my race will die with me ; accursed be those Uffingas."

"We have got one here, father," said Sexmund, looking up from his couch.

"Yes my son, and if thou die we shall slay him, and he will be thy slave in the spirit land."

"Why not send him before me, to clear the way, and let me see him die, then I could follow with more content."

"It shall be as thou desirest, my boy, if the Leech give us no hope for thee; but that time is not come yet, we do not abandon hope."

"I feel I shall not get well, and there is no use in waiting, he must go with me."

"Then we will give him another month, and unless thou art then better, he shall die before thy sight."

There was no one to teach the poor lad better things: I loathed the cruelty which they proposed, but I had only an instinct to tell me how wrong it was: when I read that passage *now* in which it is written :

"Ye hear it hath been said by men of old
 Let foes be hated, and thy friend be loved :
 But I say unto you, do good to them that hate,
 And love ye them who give not love for love,
 Even thine enemies.
 So shall ye be His children who doth aye
 Send down His quickening rain on all alike,
 Thankful and thankless; and of all that breathe
 Is the Great Father."

"*An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.*" Such was the law of our forefathers, as of them in old time of whom the Scriptures tell.

But we had not yet heard the royal law of Love expounded.

I sometimes saw the Uffinga in his prison; I did not like him of course, he had injured my brother, and sisterly love was strong in my breast, yet I would have given all I had to hear that he had escaped without doing us further harm: not even to gratify my dying brother would I

sacrifice the new born instinct in my heart which was teaching me to forgive, as I hoped to be forgiven.

The month had all but expired. Sexmund was no better, when on the day of Woden (Wednesday) a Bode arrived from King Kynewulf, then resident in his hall at Dorcic, bearing strange tidings.

A holy man, like unto him who came to Kent and brought the holy Evangel to King Ethelbert, had landed in the kingdom of Wessex, on the south shore, and having preached to the folk about Gwent,^e was on his way to seek King Cynegils, and to deliver his message to him in prison at Dorcic.

Now the King had determined to hear him for divers reasons, of which perhaps the chief one was the persuasive influence of Oswald, the saintly King of Northumbria, afterwards slain by cruel Penda the pagan, then in the first year of his reign, and desirous of becoming the son-in-law of our King ; we may be sure that he had already secured the Princess's heart; not only for himself, but for CHRIST, and that he was not without hope that he might win the royal father also.

King Cynegils, moreover, was weary of war and bloodshed ; he had slain thousands of Britons, he had, in his early youth, seen his realm overrun by King Edwin, the predecessor of Oswald, in return for the assassin Prince Cwichelm had sent to slay the Northumbrian King : he had fought with the cruel pagan, King Penda of Mercia, and now,

^e Winchester, Venta Belgarum.

weary of it all, his heart was open to the news of a world without strife, and the thought of a heaven of peace and love, brought far more rest to the royal soul, than the anticipations of a sanguinary Valhalla where strife should be eternal.

The star of Bethlehem was in the ascendant, and as of old Three Kings had come to the brightness of its rising, so now, three Saxon Kings were to be led to its shining: first Cynegils, then successively his two sons, Prince Cwichelm and Prince Cuthred.

So the King sent his Bodes to Blidberia and to Uffington, and all the halls of his Thanes, bidding them meet him on the morrow, which chanced to be the day of Thor (Thursday), and receive the ambassador of CHRIST with fitting honour.

And so father and the chief men in his train prepared to obey the royal behest—not without reluctance, for they feared magical art; but the instinct of obedience to their lord the Kyning, or King, overcame it.

Fain would we women have gone too, but we were told it would not be suffered; oh, how I longed to hear the voice of the Apostle of Wessex, how I prayed that God would incline my poor father's heart to receive it favourably.

"Sexmund," I said, "would you not like to go?"

"No, for once I am glad of my wound."

Strange the power of Satan over one so young—the bondsman of the evil one, led by him according to his will.

Churn Hlæwe is the name of the hill which rises south of Blidberia, upon it there was a barrow, beneath which lay interred, with horse and hound by his side, my grandfather Waerwulf, who had fought by the side of Cuthwulf, when he overcame the folk of the four towns, and took Wealingaford and the country around. This was the spot selected for the meeting.

It commanded a wide prospect: in the south, a track way led down the valley, across the Icknield Way, towards the vale of the Kennett, an old Welsh road—up which the blessed Birinus came from the south, with his attendant Priests and Monks; northward it looked towards the old hill-fort of Synodune, and the country beyond on either side, until the Chiltern Hills bounded the prospect towards the sun rising, and the Hills of the Ffaringas—towards the setting sun.

Here, on this elevated spot, the Thanes begged the King to meet the blessed Birinus, because they thought that there they should be safer against magical arts, which they falsely supposed Christians to use.

That day passed wearily at home, that great day, when the battle with Satan was going on at Churn Hlæwe, and the King's heart was won. Mother kept me in attendance on Sexmund, he was restless and anxious.

“Mother, do you think father will be bewitched?”

“No, my child, I have hung an amulet round his neck, containing spells from the old runes.”

"Suppose he should come home and say he believed in the CHRIST, and should refuse to give me my Uffinga to go before me into the other world."

"No fear of that, my Sexmund; he has promised thee, and he always keeps his promise for weal or woe."

"That is right, but how I hate the King for letting such a man come into the country,—if he changes his religion and becomes a coward Christian, let us sell our land and go and live under Penda; I am sure *he* will never change."

"No, he is a true wolf of the old wolf-breed."

"That he is, my mother."

I went out, I could not bear this talk. I felt so differently; I was longing for my father's conversion, and they were fearing that it might perchance be."

It was a lovely day in early spring, when the leaves were beginning to appear, and the cheering power of the sun to be felt after her winter sleep. The light southern breeze blew overhead, and chased a few fleecy clouds before it. The birds, happy in their mating time, sang sweet songs, throstle, finch, and all. Ah me, how sometimes as our Christian bard sings :

"There come sweet days so calm, so pure, and bright,
They seem like foretastes of that gladsome day
When sainted feet shall tread the ransomed earth,
When all the former things have passed away,
And GOD our FATHER hath made all things new."

I felt the cheering power of spring, and as I sat upon a mossy bank and looked up at Churn Hlæwe, a feeling of peace crept over me so blessed, so soothing, that I felt all was well, or at least would be.

I did not go in again, but wandered about the woods till I saw in the distance the groups descending the hill, and knew that my father and his men would soon be home: I spent the time in prayer, for my father and mother, and all our folk, but especially for the poor young brother, whose days were numbered, whose joys and sorrows, warlike anticipations, would so soon be ended beneath some tumulus or grave.

And what kind of grave? the old heathen mound with his favourite pony, and his favourite dog, and the dead Uffinga at his feet: or the grave of a Christian? whatever that might be, for I could only as yet imagine the rights of Christian burial.

The tramp of men, they have come home:— I gaze from a leafy screen upon them. They have grave silent faces; all seem lost in thought, none speak; I half feared to go in then.

Nor was anything said upon the subject, of which nevertheless men's hearts were full, until after the supper. Then, while the harper produced his harp, and the men gathered round the fire, and women mingled the mead and the women folk clustered behind, and the smoke, for the evenings were yet chilly, ascended from the great fire of

logs in the centre of the hall towards the roof ; my father spoke :

"Men and women, we have seen and heard strange things to-day."

A general murmur of assent.

"Which may change the laws and customs our fathers have delivered unto us."

"Thor and Woden forbid," said my mother.

"But which may, after all, be true, as the King and his wise men seem inclined to believe; and now I see that what the bard said, whom we drove away last year, was true. We know not whence we came, nor whither we go."

"To Valhalla or Niffleheim."

"Let those believe in them who can, I cannot after to-day. Yet no man changes his creed as if he were but changing his clothes, we will take time to consider the message which the ambassador of CHRIST has brought : and if I well forebode, we shall end by accepting it as Kent and Northumbria have done."

"But canst thou believe in the CHRIST?"

"It is a story of Love, stronger than death or agony : of forgiveness such as no one could have imagined ; a tale so strange and incredible that it seems as if it *must* be true ; the death of one so brave yet so good, that as we heard the story, many weather-beaten men felt the tears from fountains long dried stealing down ; old Uffa was near me, and I felt the strongest impulse to shake his hand and be friends."

"Father, father," interrupted a voice from a

couch in the corner near the fire, "remember thou hast promised me the Uffinga: I will not go to Valhalla alone."

The father went to his boy's bedside, he looked into the lustrous eyes, he stroked the wan features.

"My boy, thou shalt hear it all and decide for thyself."

And father and son talked much that night together, after the rest of us had retired, but what they said I could only conjecture from that which afterwards transpired. On the following day, after I had performed the domestic duties which fell to my share, I wandered in the woods, musing over the recent events, and the mission of holy Birinus, until I came to the pond where I had had the vision of the Crucified One, a place to which I often resorted.

And here I seated myself down and mused, until I was lost in meditation. Suddenly I started as I heard a step behind me; I looked up and recognized the bard who sang the song of Balder.

But he was in a different dress, a long dark robe reaching to the feet bound round the waist with a girdle, with a cap or hood behind.

"My daughter," he said, "fearest thou not to be thus alone in the woods?"

"I never feared the woods, nor solitude."

"And now I remember thee, thou art the daughter of Waermund, Thane of Blidberia; I was the bard who came to thy father's house last year."

"And sang the song of Balder."

He smiled.

"Thou wert then disguised."

"For the better doing of my Master's work ; but then, as now, I was sent by my superiors, for I am a Monk of the Order of S. Benedict, and am now one of the companions of Bishop Birinus, and the sharer of his holy enterprise."

"God be thanked. Oh, my father, tell me all about Him whom my soul already loveth."

"Indeed, my poor child ; how hast thou learned of Him ?"

And then I told him all.

"It is manifest," he said, "that God, the true God, has loved thee with a special love, and has seen fit to reveal Himself to thy soul : and was it then in this very water thou didst see the Form of the Crucified ?"

"It was."

He looked therein awhile with awe, and said as if to himself :

"Great and wonderful art Thy ways, Thou King of Saints."

"Tell me," I said, "about yesterday."

"I felt that our God had great things in store for this land, when I looked upon the multitude, which greeted us yesterday. Upon the barrow, once the scene of pagan rites, sat your King and the Princes : around them on the hill were their Thanes, each with his group of dependants—the multitudes surged behind. We approached singing one of our hymns about the Church :

“The sons of the aliens shall build up thy walls
And they that hated Thee Thy palaces :
GOD shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance,
And the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession :
Then shall the earth bring forth her increase,
And GOD, even our own GOD, shall give us His Blessing.
God shall bless us,
And all the ends of the earth shall fear Him.”

“And indeed, my daughter, the prophecy seems near its accomplishment. Never could heart of man resist the power and spirit with which, moved by the HOLY SPIRIT, Birinus spoke.”

“Oh, father, tell me all, instruct me too.”

And then he told me the great facts, and taught me the chief doctrines of the Holy Faith. I may not find space to repeat it all now, and indeed it would be but to repeat a lesson, too familiar now to need repetition. Suffice it to say that I arose, having learned the certainty of those things which had been simple instincts to me before : wafted by His Breath who is the mighty SPIRIT of GOD.

And then I said :

“Father, come to our house, thou wilt be welcomed now,—and see my father and mother.”

“They will not set their Ban-dogs upon me as they once threatened,” said he, smiling.

“Not now, things are changed.”

And then I told him that which lay nearest to my heart,—the story of my poor brother.

“I will come; and I trust God has sent me (*non sine numine*),” he said.

When I returned home from the woods, accompanied by the good Brother, whose name I afterwards learned was Cyprian, my father was busy in the home-farm directing his many thralls.

It was not without some little trepidation that I approached : I remembered how they had driven the *bard* away, and feared they might not reverence the *Brother* ; which shews that my faith was as yet but weak, after what had occurred the day before at Churn Hlæwe.

My father saw us approaching, and came across the fields to meet us ; as he drew near, I saw with great joy that there was no shadow of hostility on his brow.

“So thou art come again, good Brother,” he said, “I saw thee with the Bishop yesterday and knew thee again : now I know of whom thou wert thinking when thou didst sing of *Balder*.”

“Of one greater than Balder, if ever Balder was.”

“So I perceive, and now thou shalt tell us more about Him whom thou lovest.”

“And may I tell your sick boy, of whom his sister hath spoken to me ?”

“Thou shalt, with right good will, for poor lad, he is never likely to be much good in this world, or for that matter to tarry long in it : but I warn thee thou wilt have great difficulty, his heart is set on Valhalla.”

“And Valhalla is hell,” said Brother Cyprian sadly, so softly that father heeded not, then in a louder voice :

"But we must teach him holier, happier things, news which we have come across the sea to bring."

"With all my heart; and you shall teach his old mother and me too, if you like."

We all entered the hall. Mother was spinning with her handmaidens at one extremity thereof. She rose and saluted the brother with reverence, but with a certain defiant air which seemed to say :

"But you shall not convert me."

Then she set food before him, of which he partook sparingly, afterwards saying, "and now I would fain see your sick boy."

He lay in a chamber adjoining the hall on his couch; his bed was raised towards the head, the window was open at the foot, and the dear boy was lying gazing at the woods he should never traverse again with hound and horn and hunting spear. There was a hectic flush on his cheek, and his great hazel eyes were lustrous and bright beyond their wont.

"I bring a friend, dear Sexmund, to see you and talk with you."

The boy looked at him with distrust not unmingled with dislike: but the good Brother went up to him so naturally and simply, that he disarmed the hostile feeling. The Brother said nothing at first about that which lay nearest his heart, but busied himself in little offices of kindness; he arranged the bed more comfortably, he tasted the patient's drink and suggested how it could be made yet more palatable. He talked to

him of his illness, then of the woods, the fields, the hills, the birds and beasts, of everything the boy liked to hear about, and sat by his side a long time.

I left them; for I thought they would sooner get to know one another alone; the Brother went out once or twice during the day into the woods with a book in his hand, I now know that he went out to say his Office; returning he met me, for I was always thinking of him, and my thoughts guided my feet to his return path.

"My poor brother?" I said.

"We are very good friends, and shall be better soon."

"Hast thou told him of the CHRIST?"

"Not yet, I am preparing the soil; all in good time, many a crop is spoiled by hasty planting or by over-crowding the seed."

That night in the hall at supper, my father asked the Brother to sit at his right hand, and afterwards when the tables were cleared, my father said to old Wulf the harper:

"The Brother shall sing to us this night, lend him thy harp."

And nothing loth the Brother Cyprian said:

"Of what shall I sing?"

"The song of Balder."

Then again began that deathless song, which in the folk-lore of our pagan forefathers, shadowed forth the main doctrines of Christianity, and which men of much learning look upon as God-sent, to prepare His Way.

"In *Him* the blessed gods did walk with men,
The powers of good, with evil aye at war,
All that was just and kind, all that was pure
In Balder met together.

Yet was he doomed by cruel fate to die,
Nor could the whole round world avert the doom :
Not Odin, the high father, as men say,
Nor Thor the mighty thunderer though in league
With all the powers of heaven, and eke of earth,
Moved by the prayers his mother forth did pour,
Which wearied heaven, and yet were all in vain.
Then ruled in death's fell hour the powers of ill,
The great sea serpent with his cruel fangs,
And Loki, giant fiend of awful might,
And Fenris, dog accursed of demon breed :
The age of iron when men to ill shall say
Be thou my good.

But yet men say that *He* shall rise again
And burst the bonds of death which him enfold :
And then shall come the reign of blessed peace,
And earth bring forth her myriad myriad flowers
To welcome his appearing :

Then shall men turn their spears to pruning hooks :
And make their swords give place unto the plough :
And birds shall sing their songs in sweeter strains :
And suns shall rise more glorious than before :
And rippling waters run in richer flow
And fill with melody the boundless woods : *ejst*
And love shall reign where erst fierce discord reigned :
And earth resound with harmonies of Peace :
No more shall tears flow down the orphan's cheeks,
For Balder then shall wipe those tears away,
And render unto men their lost again."

"That must be a Christian song," said I.

"Nay, it is old as the Edda, in which it is found ;
but even as in the Sybiline Books of pagan Rome
were to be found prophecies of the golden age of
CHRIST, so this precious morsel of God-given truth

is mixed with the dust of the ancient heathen *mis*-belief, I say not *un*belief."

"And now tell us the story of the true Balder, of CHRIST."

And we all listened while the smoke of the fire ascending to the orifice in the roof became thinner and thinner, and the wood sank down into embers, and the embers became cold, and still the Christian bard spake on, until my father said:

"Now we must sleep upon it, wisdom may perchance visit us in dreams."

And we all retired to our couches.

Sexmund had been listening through the open door all the time, and afterwards he listened to the bard daily, until I perceived that a great change had come over him: sometimes he seemed uneasy, lost in thought, restless; sometimes he muttered, "No, I cannot give it up."

"Be of good cheer, sister, the leaven is working," said the Brother, "only the evil spirit naturally objects to be cast out."

One morning as the Brother left the sick chamber to go into the woods to say his Office, his face was so radiant that I saw he had conquered, and soon after I heard Sexmund call.

"Father, mother, sister, is no one in the hall?"

I went in and looked at the poor wan face eagerly.

"Send for father and mother, I want to get something off my mind at once."

They were not far, they entered the room, anon, with me.

"Send for the Uffinga."

"Thou wouldst not slay him *now*, my son?"

"You will see, only fulfil your promise, he is mine. The month is up, I shall never get well again."

"Trust him, father," I said, "send for the Uffinga, do you not see how changed the dear boy is?"

Father went out, and soon returned with the prisoner and the strong man who guarded him; the hands of the young Uffinga were tied, and a man stood behind him with an axe.

"Uffinga," said Sexmund, looking him full in the face, "dost thou know what thou hast done for me?"

"What thou wouldst gladly have done for me, had the power been thine."

"It is true, and now listen, I meant to slay thee to clear my path to Valhalla, and thy life was *given* me for a prey. But I have learnt of the CHRIST, who forgave His enemies while they drove the torturing nails through His Hands and Feet, and for His sake I forgive thee and give thee thy life. Loose his bonds; and now, O CHRIST, be merciful to me as I have been merciful to this Uffinga, and forgive a poor ignorant youth, who has so lately learned to reverence and fear Thee. Uffinga, one condition, not a hard one: the Brother Cyprian has saved thy life, hear for thyself what he has to say; and make him welcome to Uffa's Town."

"I will," said the released captive, deeply moved.

We were startled by a sudden interruption: a boy, the son of one of our chief franklins, burst into the room.

"Where is the Thane Waermund?"

"Here," said my father, "now rede thy rede calmly, whatever it may be."

"The Uffingas are upon us."

"Where are they?"

"Coming through the woods, in force."

"I will go and meet them," said the late captive; "all will be well now, they only seek me."

And midway in the woods he met a band of a hundred determined warriors, who had at last gathered in force determined to rescue the captive, and who would doubtless in the conflict have fired our home, and slain or been slain as they might.

They would probably have attacked us long before, but they had been greatly weakened by their losses in the recent foray, and had but just gained sufficient accession of strength to accomplish their purpose, to rescue our captive, or perish themselves; for he was the eldest son of their late chieftain slain in the raid.

And when they saw him alone and unhurt, their astonishment was only equalled by their joy.

"How hast thou escaped?"

"They have given me my liberty: henceforth let there be peace between our tribes for my sake."

"Unhurt, and without condition?" asked their leader, a grizzled old Uffinga, the uncle of our captive.

"There is but one condition."

"Not unworthy of our manhood?"

"Nay: it is but to listen to a Monk who accompanied Birinus."

"We will do *that*: why, thy grandsire, old Uffa, was there at Churn Hlæwe and heard the Bishop with joy, he almost forgot the death of his son, thy father, in the foray."

"It is well, I will return alone, and ask them to receive us as guests, and we will hear the *Brother*, who in sooth saved my life."

"How? Saved thy life?"

"By the preaching of forgiveness, else you had been too late to save, only in time to avenge."

"The blood of thy father yet crieth for vengeance."

"We will talk of that when we have heard the men whom King Cynegils delighteth to honour."

"Already the King talketh of forbidding all blood-feuds."

"What will the land come to?" said another.

The late captive returned alone, we were all awaiting him: prepared for war or peace as the case might be; but anticipating the latter, *peace*.

"My people greet yours," he said to my father, "and ask leave to visit you, to hear the words of the preacher, from across the seas."

Some suspected treachery, but the captive said :

"I am the son of Uffa, the grandson of the elder Uffa, the father of the tribe, who first settled in these parts, and I will pledge my faith that we will depart again in peace, our purpose accomplished."

"We will trust thee," said my father.

And the two tribes met as friends ; and on the green sward, where the old men held their assemblies, around a hoary oak, gathered together to hear Brother Cyprian.

None could resist the words of wisdom which he spoke, nor the tale of Love Divine which, like a rich melody, fell on our ears : once more the tale of the Redemption wrought on Calvary was told, once more tears coursed down channels long unaccustomed to such gentle streams ; ah me ! in those early days how fresh it all came ! how convincing the simple arguments : with what outpouring of the Mighty SPIRIT the words were accompanied, and as it is written in the *Acts of the Apostles*, "The HOLY GHOST fell on them that heard."

When he had finished, he told the story of "The LORD and the unmerciful servant," and pleaded that, having been forgiven the *ten thousand talents*, they should not exact the *thirty pence* from their neighbours.

"Let the first step in your conversion be forgiveness ; forgive, as ye are forgiven, Uffingas and Blidberians love one another."

There was a dead silence, and then first the leaders

embraced and, in the presence of the warriors, renounced their blood-feud, and then all the sometime enemies mingled together as friends, giving to each other the right hand of fellowship.

Then the fatted calf was slain, tables spread in the open air, a general but temperate feast was held, and afterwards the Uffingas departed, having first obtained the promise of the Missionary that he would shortly visit them, and prepare them for Holy Baptism.

That same night, my dear brother Sexmund was observed to change for death. Brother Cyprian baptized him as he lay, and then administered the Holy Viaticum. We were all present, father, mother, my sister Ermenred, who arrived just in time, and I.

"Art thou resigned, dearest boy?"

"Quite," he answered.

"And thou dost not regret Valhalla now?"

"No, I have learned better, I desire none but CHRIST who died for me. Now come," he said, "father, mother, sisters, and hear the last words of your Sexmund: I loved the beauty of the earth, I loved the glory of the warrior, and God has taken it from me, but He has given me that which is a thousand times better, and how can I murmur or repine. There is much *yet* I cannot understand in all this good father has taught me, but I am going where he tells me I shall understand it all. Oh, my father," turning to Cyprian, "how can I

repay you, God sent you to me," and he took the hand of the good Monk and kissed it fervently.

A little more he said, as he was able, at intervals, his hope that all would be baptized, all the tribe, and that he should meet us all in a better land.

"Oh, my son, how can I spare thee?" said the mother.

"It will not be long; be baptized and believe in CHRIST, I shall linger near the door till you come too."

There was nothing painful in that death; it came quietly, so gently that we knew not when he had passed away, until we heard Brother Cyprian commending the departed soul to God.

Then the mother burst into an agony of tears, but the father turned to the good Monk, and said:

"You have taught our poor boy the way to heaven: his poor mother and I are very ignorant, you shall teach us also."

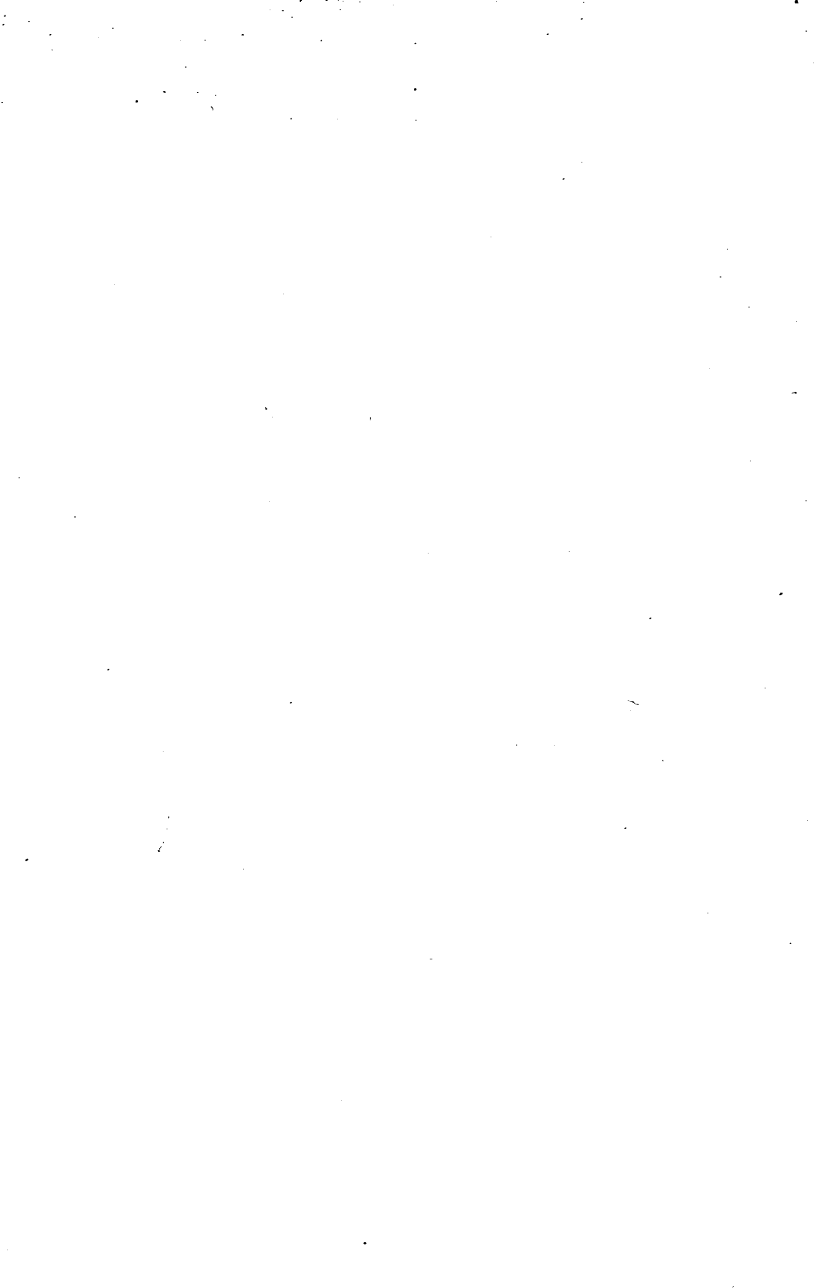
Shortly afterwards there was a grand victory over Satan consummated at Dorcic-on-Tame. Bishop Birinus baptized King Cynegils; Oswald, King of Northumbria, being sponsor; and afterwards many of the Nobles and Thanes followed their King's example, and were born of God in the "Laver of Regeneration."

Amongst them were my dear father and mother and my sister and her husband.

And directly afterwards my father built a little Church at Blidberia, and endowed it with the tithe or tenth part of all his lands, and Brother Cyprian came to be our first Parish Priest, for he was now getting old, and glad when the Bishop told him to end his wandering, and settle down in peace amongst a people of his own. And before he had been there long, the whole population was baptized, and we became a united Christian people, as did also the Uffingas under their hills.

Many happy years did I spend at home after these events, taking care of my parents in their old age. The young Uffinga solicited me in marriage, but the love of the heavenly Bridegroom filled my heart and left no place for earthly love; and when in the course of nature it pleased God to call my dear parents to Himself, I took the vows in this our poor house of S. Mary of Bethany at Dorcic, to Him whose spouse I hope to be for ever and ever.







Two Battles.

A TALE OF S. OSWALD, KING AND MARTYR.

I.—HEAVENFIELD.



T was a grand day at Ripon, when S. Wilfrid consecrated the Minster; "*many a blow and biting sculpture*" had polished the pure white stone of the basilica, which he had raised in the place of the wooden fabric which had preceded; there were pillars of exquisite form separating the aisles from the nave, there were arched vaults and winding cloisters, such as were surely never seen in England before, for had not the Bishop brought cunning architects from across the seas, yea, even from the mother and mistress of Churches, mighty Rome.

And now he had invited the King, and the King's brother, Alfwin, and many Reeves and Thanes to witness the dedication, and eke many Abbots and Bishops to take part therein. Oh, how comely was Wilfrid when he put on the robe of honour,

and was clothed with the perfection of glory! when he went up to the holy Altar, truly he made the garment of holiness honourable.

And as he stood there, compassed with his brethren about, like a young cedar in Libanus, and they as palm-trees around him, pleasing were their oblations in the sight of the LORD God of Hosts.^a

Many a holy psalm was sung, many a prayer prayed, the Altar was solemnly blessed and vested in purple and cloth of gold, then were hallowed the Chalice and Paten, and then the oblations made and blessed ere Wilfrid uplifted his "SURSUM CORDA."

The Sacrifice complete, the Bishop read the roll of the lands given to the Monastery, and also of those previously bestowed on the earlier Celtic Church which had departed after that—

"Rome met the Celts in conflict sore
At Whitby in six-sixty-four,"

and won the victory for Catholic usages and orthodox customs.^b

And all the Princes and Prelates said "AMEN" when Wilfrid pronounced the usual solemn curse on all who should rob or alienate the lands or possessions given to God.

"Amen; may his light be put out in darkness."

And Wilfrid gave his own special gifts which he had brought from over sea, to wit, a large shining

^a Eccclus. l. 12.

^b It is evident that the writer was on Wilfrid's side in the Roman-Celtic controversy.

golden Cross, and oh, *mirabile dictu*, a splendid copy of the *Four Gospels*, the evangelion, written in letters of gold upon richly coloured parchment, and the very case that contained it was worth a King's ransom, wrought with gold and jewels. Oft have these unworthy eyes perused its hallowed pages, for we preserve it as our Palladium in the Minster.

And now that the hallowing was complete, following the example of King Solomon, who after the dedication of the Temple feasted right royally with his people, our people held their "Feast."

But ours was only protracted for three days and nights: how much wine, ale and mead the laity drank, and how many sheep and oxen they ate no man might tell, but we Monks feasted more sparingly, and with less noise and clamour, in the hall of the Monastery.

And there the boy Willibrord, one of the acolytes, and also the sweetest singer amongst his fellows, waited upon the good Bishop, and presented him with wine and meat on bended knee: he was a bright little fellow then, with flaxen hair and light blue eyes: now he is a missionary over sea and a great wonder-worker for God.

And near the Bishop sat one in the decline of life, with hoary head and beard reaching down to his waist: this was Brother Elfric, he had taken the vows when King Oswy first gave the land for the Monastery to the Scotists, and had wisely chosen to linger in the place he loved, and to worship God in the more excellent way as taught by our Mother across the seas.

He had been with the holy Oswald at the battle of Heavenfield, when God gave deliverance to His people: and when our *Josiah* fell at *Megiddo*, which men call Maserfield, beneath that cruel *Pharoah Necho*, the pagan Penda, now happily for us gone to his own place, Elfric fought by his side.

Now Wilfrid knowing this, when men had satisfied the desire of eating and drinking, cried:

"Our brethren of the laity have their minstrels and tale tellers, but so have we; let Father Elfric tell us of our Saint and Martyr King Oswald."

"Nay, holy Father, my powers of speech are unequal to the holy theme."

"We will bear with thee, even if it be as thou sayest in thy humility."

And the good Elfric, taking courage, began, while we sat round in dead silence and caught every word.

"Few and evil have been the days of my pilgrimage, yet can I well remember the desolation of the land, after the death of the good King Edwin at Heathfield, when Penda, the tyrant of Mercia, and the fierce Welshman, Cadwalla, were permitted to overcome him in battle. My father, who was Thane of Heathfield, was slain in battle, and when the tidings were brought by the fugitives of the loss of the battle and the death of the King, it fell to my lot as the eldest son, to save my mother and brothers and sisters from the cruel foes.

"Cruel indeed they were; the fierce Cadwalla, like most Welshmen, hated all English folk

because our ancestors had taken the land from his : he counted us as no Christians at all, although he professed himself to be one ; and to slay with all manner of cruel deaths, to burn, to destroy, was all the desire of this ravening wolf.

“ And Penda the pagan, truly he was the foe of the Church of God all his life, and spared neither old nor young, specially vengeful was he against Priest or Prelate, Monk or Nun.

“ I was then only fifteen years of age, or I had gone down to the fight, and perchance been slain ; but my mother’s tears restrained me, and my father’s last words were :

“ ‘ I know thou wouldst fain go with me, for thou art a brave boy ; but thou hast to take my place at home if I fall, and the odds are greatly against us. Nay, my son, if I never return, thou must defend and protect the home folk ; and I charge thee, if we are defeated, not to stay to enquire about my fate, or it may be too late to save those we love, but to make for the farm we have upon the wooded hills at once ; amidst that thick forest thou mayest escape the devouring flood which must pour over this unhappy land if the day go against us, and there I will join thee, *if I live.*’

“ So we watched in the distance, and all too soon we heard of the fatal issue of the day, and the death of the King and his eldest son, Prince Asfrid ; none could tell us at first of my father, fain would I have gone to seek him, but his own words restrained me, and I made for the northern hills of which he had spoken, taking with me my

♦

weeping mother and the little ones, with such beasts of burden as could best bear us away.

"Ah me, how awful it was to look back from the hill tops on the lost country: it all comes back like a cruel dream,—village and hamlet, Church and hall, gave forth sheets of ruddy fire, and clouds of black smoke to heaven. 'O LORD! how long? how long?' we cried, 'oh see what mischief Penda and Cadwalla are doing!'

"Happily for us we had this lone farm in the thick woods, which clothed a valley amidst the hills, amidst which a stream (a tributary of the Don) arose. It was only accessible by difficult paths, and it was unlikely any would find us out.

"Here we arrived, all safe, but sad at heart, and awaited the father who never came. Every day hope grew less, and at last we felt sure he had died by his King, for we knew that if he lived, nought would keep him from those he loved.

"All of our ceorls and thralls who had not gone forth to the war, and they were only the young and the old, had fled to the mountains with us, and we had plenty of hands to till the ground. The river abounded with fish, the hills and woods with game, there was no lack of food.

"There we lived during the year which men still call '*The hateful year*,' during which Cadwalla raged through the country slaying not only men, but the women and children, and not merely slaying, but putting them to deaths of torture, avenging, as he said, the like cruelties committed by Ida the flame-bearer, when a century earlier,

at the head of his English, he drove the Britons out of the land and made it Northumbria.

"It was all too true, our pagan grandfathers did like cruel deeds, but Cadwalla should have remembered, as a Christian, who it was that said, '*Vengeance is Mine, I will repay*:' yet who can doubt that in this way the sins of our forefathers were visited upon the children even to the fourth generation.

"A year passed away: for the first few weeks we fondly hoped our father yet lived, and would join us; then hope grew fainter, and at last died away.

"But it was not till months had passed away that the only surviving vassal, who saw him fall, wounded himself, and heartbroken, found us out at the woodland farm, and told us how the father and all his men had fallen around their sainted King, and he alone was left: left for dead upon the field, creeping away when all was over, a cripple for life, nursed by some kind folk, and at last able to seek us in the hills, and tell us all the sad, yet glorious truth.

"For was it not a martyr's death, or almost as good, thus to die for King and country?

"During this year we were deprived of nearly all means of grace, but *James the Chanter* [who, after the Bishop Paulinus had fled deserting his flock, remained behind], although only a deacon, did a true pastor's work, keeping the blessed flame alive, and taking great spoil from the ancient enemy by preaching and baptizing. True minister of CHRIST was he.

“Once he came to our woodland home, and spent a peaceful LORD’s Day with us; oh how we loved the ‘Word of Life’ then! And how sweetly he sang, he had wonderful skill in the Church music. Tall in presence, with dark eyes and foreign features, he seemed like a messenger from the other world, as he sang the ‘*Super flumina*,’ or the ‘*De profundis*.’

“Two of the sons of the royal family yet survived, but hoping to propitiate Penda, they renounced their faith and became pagan. But all in vain; Osric was killed by the Britons, who held York against him, and Eanfrid by the wolf Cadwalla, to whom he came to beg peace, but who slew him with glee in the double capacity of Englishman and pagan, and said that thereby he was doing GOD service. Oh wily serpent, many were thy windings!

“At the close of the autumn, when the harvest was all gathered in at our Zoar, came James the Deacon, and with him a stranger of noble mien, whom, after he had partaken of our bread and salt, he introduced as OSWALD, son of Ethelfrid, and nephew of Edwin, and said that he was preparing, in the character of a Christian Prince, to deliver our poor country from Cadwalla.

“He had fled with his brothers, Eanfrid and Osric, to the north, and found refuge at Iona, with the followers of S. Columba, after the death of his father, at the river Iddle in Mercia. There he had become a true Christian, although after the Scottish fashion. And now he had sought out

James the Deacon, and was travelling about with him, to renew the allegiance of his people, and make plans for the battle which must be fought for the deliverance of the land; and surely, if any held back, they would deserve the 'Curse of Meroz.'^c

"It is true that my mother regarded his arrival with mingled feelings. She had lost her husband by war. She feared now that she would lose me also, but I told her that my heart burned for the deliverance of our poor country, that it was base selfishness to repose in our own security when so many homes lay desolate, and that my father might well rise from the grave and chide me were I backward in the cause for which he had laid down his life.

"'I told you,' said James the Deacon to the Prince, 'that there were yet seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal. God bless thee, my son.'

"Oswald had spent seventeen years in banishment, but they had been times of blessing; he was a true Christian, and brave Englishman, and how he did win our hearts! 'God bless thee, mother,' he said, 'I hope to bring back thy son safe and sound again, but we must all do our duty now for our bleeding country.'

"He left us on the morrow, and I was told that when I received the token of a wooden cross dipped in blood at each extremity, which the bearer would carry round, I was to join him, the King (as I may now call him), on a rising ground

^c Judges v. 23.

to the north of the Roman hall within a few miles of Hagulstadt (Hexham), where there stood a blasted oak, on a summit commanding a wide view of the desolated land.

“Weeks passed away and we heard no more; the winter came on with frost and snow, and mother began to think we were all safe till the spring; we were sometimes alarmed by rumours that the Welshmen were about to explore our woods in search of isolated farm-houses, like ours, which they might ravage; and I pointed out to the mother that ours was only a false security, that any day we might be discovered by the prowling bands, from whom, as yet, we had been protected by God’s special favour.

“But ere that evil day could arrive, the bodes came round and bore the token of combat, they rushed from hamlet to hamlet, homestead to homestead, and all that night from North, South, East, and West, men were hurrying to the trysting place. It was dawn on the morning of S. Andrew’s Day when I, with a dozen of our youths who were old enough for fighting, came in sight of the hill, and we saw similar bands from every point approaching the old oak tree.

“It was at the sundown of the winter evening that he caused a large cross of wood to be made, and with his own hands he held it, while the cavity was being filled up in which it was placed in the earth. Then, when the holy symbol was firmly fixed, and pointed to the skies, Oswald cried aloud:

“ ‘ Here we fix the *vexilla regis*, the standard of our King : under its shade we will conquer or die ; let us all bend our knees, and pray to the LORD omnipotent, who knoweth the justice of our cause, to defend us against our remorseless enemy : for He Himself seeth that we fight not for vainglory, but for the safety of our nation, nay, its very existence.

“ ‘ Now let us all sleep (our next sleep may be in Paradise) ; under the protection of God’s holy angels rest we now.’

“ When the sacred ceremony was ended, I left my recruits, and went to report myself to the King.

“ ‘ Ah, it is thou, Elfric, thou hast fulfilled thy promise ; well do I remember that visit to thy hospitable homestead in the woods, that little Zoar, where thy people have hidden themselves until this calamity be overpast, as it is about to be. Thou shalt share in the triumph which I feel awaits us ; and I doubt not I shall restore thee in peace to the mother, who has but lent thee to me.’

“ The night was cold, there was a slight frost, but there was no snow as yet on the ground ; we made huge fires, and such as had tents crept under their shelter ; others, like myself, only crept as near as possible to the genial warmth of the huge fires, and wrapped ourselves in our warmest garments ; in war men must bear these things, and it is well for them who have not accustomed themselves to fare too delicately.

"And while the King slept, S. Columba appeared unto him in a dream, and assured him both of victory on the morrow, and of a happy reign ; and early in the morning, the news of the vision spread throughout the camp, and gave us all great encouragement to fight the battle of the LORD, for our hearths and for our altars.

"Early in the morning, before dawn, all the camp was astir, for the news arrived that Cadwalla, having heard of our gathering, was ascending from Hagulstadt (Hexham).

"It was a foggy morning, and we could see nothing, only we could hear, when our own folk were quiet enough, a confused murmur and a pulsation of the earth, as of many feet : swiftly we got into line, and took our formation, I with my few men were in the centre, and for a few brief moments we were all silent as death ; the King took advantage and cried :

"'Let God arise, and let all His enemies be scattered : yea, let all them that hate Him flee before Him.'

"And as he paused, we heard again the subdued murmur, and the tread of many feet, and louder, nearer than before.

"'Descend and charge,' cried our leader ; *'we shall take them by surprise.'*

"And we rushed through the fog, keeping our order strictly, the two wings a little ahead : the ground sloped gently down to a stream a mile or two distant, called the Denisburne, behind us was the summit crowned by the old oak tree,

and the yet older Roman wall. Cadwalla had evidently meant to take *us* by surprise, and our sudden rush and issue from the fog took *him* unawares, and with his greatly superior force unformed.

“The consequence was that we bore them down, and in the desperate struggle, I being in the centre, where both Oswald and Cadwalla fought, saw the tyrant fall, struck by a spear while vainly endeavouring to restore order, and re-form his scattered array. So darkness veiled his eyes, and the proud and fierce King breathed forth his cruel spirit, filled with unrelenting hatred against us English folk till the last.

“*‘O give thanks unto the Lord, Who smote great kings: for His mercy endureth for ever.’*

“So let us leave Cadwalla with Og the King of Bashan, and Sehon King of the Amorites.

“The victory was ours, thanks to Him who doeth great wonders; the Welshmen and Cumbrians fled on every side for their own distant land, leaving thousands stretched in death upon the ground of Heavenfield, for such was the fitting name of the spot where Oswald erected his cross the evening before, a name given to it long ago, not without God’s inspiration, as a prophecy that in times to come the sign of our redemption should be set up there, and that God should there deliver His people.

“And of the Welshmen it was said :

“ ‘*Cædes Cadwallæ Denisi cursus coercuit* ;’ or,

“ ‘Cadwalla’s slaughter stopped the Denis flow. So fierce was the struggle, so dread the carnage in which the tyrant’s life was ended.’ ”

NOTE.—This Cadwalla first invaded Northumbria in revenge for the slaughter of the Monks of Bangor by Ethelfred, father of Oswald: Edwin, who succeeded Ethelfred, chased Cadwalla, not only out of Northumbria, but from his own land; so that he took refuge in Ireland, whence, as we have seen, he returned and allied himself with Penda. This battle of Heavenfield crushed all the hopes of a Welsh reconquest of Northern Britain. It must be owned Cadwalla had great cause for his hatred of the English.

II. MASERFIELD.

“THE Cross which S. Oswald erected on the eve of the glorious victory with which God blessed his arms yet standeth,” continued Father Elfric, “and on the eve of the day when it pleased God to call our Josiah from that Megiddo, which men call Maserfield, to his glorious rest, our brethren of Hexham go to the spot, over night, sing the holy Office on the eve, and say Mass at day break.

“And the virtue of this precious Cross is very great, many miracles have been worked by it. Chips have been cut off and, when soaked in water, that water sprinkled over the aching head, or palsied limb, hath been known to make the

sick whole of whatever disease they had : marvel not, it is even as when of old men stepped down into the pool called 'Siloam,' after the Angel had troubled the water : is not God as mighty as of old ?

" But to turn from these lesser benefits, the great blessing God gave to Northumbria by Oswald was the re-establishment of the Church, which, since the departure of Paulinus, had well nigh ceased, in the eyes of men, to exist.

" Oswald did not attempt to recall Paulinus, he turned to his own mother in the faith, to the Church of Scotland, and the Isle of Iona, to which naturally he was warmly attached ; men love the manners and customs in which they have been trained, and although we all thank God that our jars and differences have been settled at Whitby, and that *Columba* has yielded to Peter, yet we will ever acknowledge the holiness and devotion of the children of *Columba*.

" To that Church, then, our Oswald turned, and they sent us Corman, and sent him in vain, for he could not speak our English tongue ; and he was one of the sterner sort of saints, who terrified rather than attracted, forgetting that more flies are caught by a spoonful of honey than a bucketful of vinegar.

" So Corman went home to Iona, and said that the English were incorrigible, and could not be converted.

" Then rose up one, Aidan, a Monk in that holy house, and said :

" ' My brother, it seemeth to my humility that

thou wert harsh towards them, and did not, according to apostolic precept, give tender milk to babes, until they were able to take meat.'

"Then cried the Abbot :

"'Aidan, thou art the man, thou shalt go thyself, and try thine own methods.'

"So they made him a Bishop, and sent him across the mountains to Northumbria, where Oswald gladly received him.

"Now on the coast of Northumbria there is, as you all know, a rocky island, not unlike Iona—not far from Bamborough—by Oswald's city, and men call it Lindisfarne. There the winds ever sing their dirges, and the wild fowl make their nests, and with the howling of the winds mingled the holy song of the Monks, '*Oh all ye winds, bless ye the Lord!*' for there, as in another Iona, Aidan fixed his Episcopal residence and raised a Monastery.

"For eight holy and happy years, Oswald and Aidan, like David and Jonathan, walked hand in hand, and worked with one accord for the glory of the LORD. Churches were built, schools erected, monasteries founded ; and amongst them, *Hexham*, which followed the ritual and discipline of the Scots, until they learned better things.

"All the country was explored, they reached our woodland farm, and James the Chanter became the Parochus or Parish Priest of our little Zoar.

"I became, at his special request, the chamberlain of King Oswald, and the years that followed were eight of the happiest years it was ever

man's lot to enjoy. Daily did holy Scotchmen, like Aidan, follow the Bishop over the border, preaching the Gospel all over Northumbria, and baptizing their converts: and when the Bishop himself preached, the King would interpret his sermons to his great men, having learned the Celtic tongue well, in his years of exile; for Aidan as yet spake not the English tongue with fluency.

"The Church of S. Peter, at York, was completed, which Edwin, under the direction of Paulinus, had begun to build, and many another noble Church of stone arose under the royal liberality.

"He was seldom absent from his kingdom, but it happened to me to accompany him when he went to the Court of Wessex to ask in marriage the daughter of Cynegils, the King, who held his Court at Dorchester on Tame: and while our King was there, S. Birinus came from the south to preach the glad tidings: Cynegils was converted, and Oswald was his sponsor at the font, the spiritual father of his own father-in-law. These things I beheld with my eyes, and never shall I forget the Baptism in the waters of the Tame, which joins the Thames beneath the old hill-fort of Sinodun: noble after noble, thane after thane, followed their King's example; Woden and Thor were forsaken, CHRIST reigned, CHRIST triumphed everywhere. And when we had seen these things, and beheld the foundation of the new Cathedral laid, we returned to Northumbria, through the domains of Penda the wolf, with

whom we were then at peace, to our own Northern land.

"Often was our royal Saint favoured with visions, whereat marvel ye not, for he lived in heavenly places; his motto was ever '*Sursum Corda.*' He rose at midnight for Matins and Lauds, and when the Office was over, he remained in prayer till the golden light of dawn summoned him to the toils of government. '*Laborare est orare,*' such a habit of recollection and devotion was his, that he might be said 'to pray without ceasing.'

"Now it pleased God, during his reign, to afflict the people with a terrible pestilence, so that multitudes died on all sides, and the Priests had enough to do to administer the Holy Viaticum to the dying, and to bury the dead. I was then a page at court in personal attendance on the King: and I heard him again and again pray that God would accept him as a sacrifice for his people, and take him to his rest and spare them. And literally was the prayer answered; it was my painful lot to minister to my beloved monarch, sick, and as we all thought, dying with the plague: and it struck him with unusual violence, he even lay upon his cross in bitter agony of body, yet rejoicing in spirit.

"*"I feel now,"* he said, *"that God will spare my people, He heareth not prayer by halves."*

"And so God did spare the people, and the pestilence ceased, while, after the example of his Divine Master, Oswald lay on his death-bed (as we thought) offering his life for the lives of his

subjects, who would one and all have rather died for him.

“And one day I saw him, as in an ecstasy, a trance, and over his face I saw a heavenly light pass, and the features assume an expression of joy such as shall belong to the resurrection bodies of God’s saints. It lasted not, and when he awoke, he told us he had seen three shining ones, who came to his bedside, and addressed him in turn.

Thus the first :

‘Thy prayers, O King, accepted are of God,
And thou thyself, accepted art of Him.’

Then the second :

‘Thy people’s lives and thine, to thee are given,
That thou in turn mayst give thine own for God.’

Then the third :

‘Faith, hope, and love, thy virtues are on earth,
A martyr’s Crown awaiteth thee in Heaven.’

“‘And they have left me full of joy,’ said the royal patient: ‘bring me food and drink, for I am getting well.’

“On the next Easter Day, at York, the sainted King entertained the no less holy Bishop Aidan. The great solemnities were over, the High Mass at S. Peter’s Cathedral said, and now the festal board was spread in the Palace. Before them lay silver dishes filled with the good things of this life, which on Easter Day men might indulge in without reproach.

“‘*Benedic nos Domine et haec tua dona,*’ said Aidan, when an officer peculiar to Oswald’s court appeared, ‘The Servitor of the Poor.’

“ ‘The streets around are filled with poor who have no dinner.’

“ ‘No dinner on Easter Day! Take this fish, this flesh, this confectionery:’ and so on till the board was empty.

“ The astonished servants obeyed.

“ ‘Now break the silver dishes up for the melting-pot and divide them too: starving on Easter Day! The LORD look upon it!’

“ ‘But,’ said the Bishop, ‘thou hast left nought for thyself.’

“ ‘What does it matter for me.’

“ And, moved by a sudden impulse, the Bishop kissed the royal hand.

“ ‘May this hand never perish,’ said he.

“ And it never *did*, the faithful venerate it to this day in S. Peter’s Church at Bamborough: uncorrupt and incorruptible.

“ Then he and the Bishop dined on such fare as seemed better suited for Lent, and no doubt it was to them as the Manna, which, we are told, was to each man’s taste just the savour he liked best. *A merry heart* was Aidan’s Easter feast that year with King Oswald.

“ These are but a few gleanings of grapes from Eshcol, far more did I see and behold while I was the King’s Chamberlain, now at York, now at Bamborough, or in retreat at Hexham, or here at Ripon.

“ Alas! I must now tell how GOD took our Josiah home.

“ Pharaoh Necho, in the shape of the cruel wolf Penda the pagan, who had slain King Edwin,

again envied our prosperity and bore ill-will to our Zion. Like Sanballat and Tobias, he brooked ill that the walls of God's House should be raised in Northumbria, in spite of him.

"So in the thirty-eighth year of my royal master's age, he picked a quarrel and invaded our dominions, ravaging, as of old, our lands with fire and sword, so that our Oswald must needs go down to Megiddo to protect his flock.

"His forces were far inferior to those of the pagan army, and it pleased God to take him to Himself. Hemmed in by armed foes, their weapons overshadowing us as the branches of trees, were we surrounded. I would fain have given my life for him, for I stood by his side, unworthy as I am to live to record it, until I was stunned by a blow on the head; and lost all consciousness; but before I fell, I heard the King pray aloud:

"O God, have mercy on the soul of my people,' and these must have been his last words: he was still young, even as the young Josiah to whom I have compared him: when he was taken from the evil to come, 'he *was not*, for God took him.' But oh, for the land he left behind——;" and Elfric's voice was broken by sobs.

"Doubtless he does as much good for it, as an intercessor in Heaven, as he could have done upon earth," said Wilfrid; "peace, my father! thou shalt yet meet thy royal master above."

"No sooner was he dead," began Elfric again, with a voice struggling with sobs, "than the brutal Mercians dismembered him, they exposed his head

and arms on wooden stakes, where they remained on the battlefield, till his younger brother, Oswy, was able to rescue them in the following year.'

"But the very spot where they rested on the battlefield remained green and fertile all through the winter snow, and when at last they were removed, the head was sent to rest with Aidan at Lindisfarne, the arm Aidan had kissed uncorrupt at Bamborough, the rest of his relics were translated by his niece, Osthryda, to the great Abbey of Bardney, in Lindsay, where the folk, out of jealousy, refused to admit him as a Saint, who had reigned over them as a foreign 'Over-lord,' so the wain, which bore the remains, rested all night without the gate. But God sent a luminous pillar of fire, which, resting upon the car, rose as a radiant column to the skies: all the folk of the land saw it, and the Monks gladly received the relics of one whom Heaven thus honoured: and many miracles are even now daily wrought by the holy dust, of which one writes:

'Once wisdom breathed and dwelt herein,
And CHRIST within them moved,
Now let them win in holy fane,
Sweet rest, oh earth beloved.
God will remember His high grace,
And the dread stamp of His own awful Face.'

"Even the very ground where he rested awhile became the scenes of many miracles, men scraped up the dust of the spot where he had fallen, and put it into water, and gave it to the sick, who were straightway healed.

"I myself lay for dead on the battlefield, close by the sacred spot, there on the second day I was found with life in me: unworthy to survive my dear lord and master. So I became a Monk in this holy house, that I might give the residue of the life He spared to God: I think I owe my life to the sanctity of the spot, for many sick laid thereon have recovered. Not only in England, but in Ireland, nay, in Germany, have some been saved, and sick been healed by his intercessions."

So Father Elfric ended his story, and Wilfrid spoke:

"Well has our brother spoken of the great and holy King, whom I remember, as a child, to have seen. I was but nine years of age when the battle of Maserfield was fought, yet the grief and desolation, and the fear and terror which ensued, seem to rise before my mind even now.

"Scotist indeed he was, and addicted to the schismatic usages, not from any fault of his own, but because he had never been privileged to cross the sea, and view the perfection of the great mother and mistress of Churches; yet I truly say, *Sit anima mea cum illo*, at the last."

THE END.

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